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SOME OF OUR GIRLS.

BY

MRS. C. J. EILOART.

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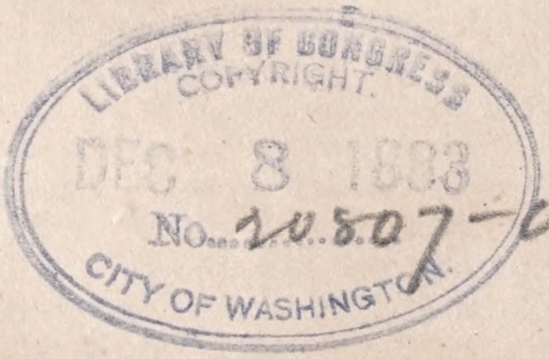
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Some of Our Girls.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. C. J. EILOART.

4°
Seaside



NEW YORK:
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SOME OF OUR GIRLS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES OUR HEROINES.

THERE were four of them: two in the kitchen, one in the drawing-room, and one in a large, untidy room at the top of the house, formerly the nursery, and now called the school-room. Four girls between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two; and, excepting for the fact that they *were* girls, that all spoke the same language more or less grammatically, owned the same nationality, and had skins of the same color, there seemed not a single tie or connecting link between them; four girls all in the morning of their lives, all, it may be supposed, actuated by something like the same hopes and fears as to what their lives would bring forth, all living under the same roof, and all as far apart as if each separate girl was surrounded by a wall of ice that shut her in from her fellows.

It was not such a very large house either in which the four were located. It stood at the corner of one of those quiet, dull, respectable streets that diverge from the nest of squares situated between the Euston Road and Holborn. There was a brass-plate on the door, with "Mr. Williams, Surgeon and Accoucheur," on it. There was a red lamp suspended from the iron that arched over the steps, and at the side of the house was a small room built out on a portion of the back garden, with "Surgery" on the door.

The street had been a good one, but it was going down now. People who wanted tenements of the size of those to be found in it preferred going a little further from the metropolitan center and taking villas, where, in spring at least, the grass would look green and the leaves show freshly. More than half of Wurtemburg Street was let out in lodgings. People did it so boldly too, much to the annoyance of poor Mrs. Williams, who said they had no consideration for the character of the street; they might at least advertise or go to an agent, but, instead of doing either, they put bills over the fan-lights, and in the front parlor windows, announcing that they had "Apartments," so that the solidly-respectable tone of the street was altogether gone from it.

Mr. Williams could not move from the street, though it had

deteriorated so much since he commenced practice in it. His patients were all in the immediate neighborhood, and they would not be likely to follow him if he went to the West End. Neither was he in a position to take a higher rented house than the one he now occupied, He had enough to do to make both ends meet at the end of the year, and it taxed his wife's ingenuity to the utmost to keep up appearances, and prevent the world at large—the little world of the two or three adjoining squares and streets—finding out how straitened were the means of the doctor's household.

There were four children to teach and be attended to; it was done very cheaply—how cheaply we shall see presently; and there was a carriage to be maintained—it would never do for the doctor to visit his patients on foot, or he might lose half of them; and there was the house to be kept in order, the steps to be hearthstoned, the brass-plate kept brightly polished; and for all such services "cook" and "housemaid" were indispensable. And though cook and housemaid were kept as cheaply as possible, and paid as little as might be, still it was a difficult task sometimes to provide the funds even for the plain food and scanty wages which Mrs. Williams gave her domestics.

"Cook" and "housemaid" were two of the girls with whom we have to deal, and so we will go to the lower regions first, and visit them in their own domain.

"Cook" was Susan Smith, and she was sitting by the kitchen fire this dull November evening with her crochet-hook in her hand, manufacturing, of all things in the world, an antimacassar such as young ladies make to save the drawing-room furniture. It was not likely that Susan would ever have any furniture worth such saving, and it was certain that her mother's cane-seated, wooden-backed chairs were little in need of such an article. Still the work was pretty and "genteel;" Susan felt herself almost a lady while she did it; so, though her stockings were out both at heels and toes, and she had not a single garment but was in need of repair, Susan went on counting her trebles and long stitches, with as calm a sense of enjoyment in the progress of her work as if, when completed, it was likely to be of the slightest use to any created being.

Susan was a born Londoner. Nobody could mistake her for anything else. The sallow complexion, that breeze had never freshened nor sun embrowned; the dull, dark, straight hair, that owed all its luster to cheap pomade, and none to the sheen and the gloss that spring from a healthy, vigorous organization; the narrow chest, the slight, spare frame; the keen, pert, lustrous eyes; the flippant, half-defiant manner, by which both master and mistress were taught that their handmaiden was as good as they, unless on those points where she was decidedly better; the dress, which in its flounces and frills was such a wretched, slatternly mockery of the prevailing fashion of the day,—all proclaimed the daughter of the crowded streets and narrow alleys of our great Babel.

Susan was not the most favorable specimen of a London servant. Born Londoners rarely are. She had had no specific training for her present duties beyond that involved in serving for a year or two in a small lodging-house when she first entered on her teens. Then Susan had taken to slopwork as more "genteel," and lived with

her mother and a sister whose spine was injured, in one small room, where the three subsisted on weak tea without milk, bread-and-butter, saveloys, and red herrings, but where Susan could wear both her chignons and crinolines as large as she pleased. This lasted for two or three years, during which she had the pleasure of styling herself "Miss Smith." She would have starved sooner than have given up that Miss; but something worse than starvation seemed likely to befall her. She lost her appetite, and her ability to work; she had a cough and a headache; and then her mother took her to one of the hospitals, where she had advice and medicine gratuitously. The medicine did her little good; the advice was that she should give up needle-work and take to service again.

Susan and her mother had implicit faith in "the doctor;" and as the doctor said he could do nothing for Susan if she still chose to work at her needle, to service she submitted to go. It cost her a struggle at first. Susan had a soul above service. She had to give up her liberty, her evenings out, and her Sundays, and to wear a scrap of dirty net which she called a cap, and be called by her Christian name. She had to take an inferior situation at first, and at the end of three months changed it for one very little better. She averaged five situations in a twelvemonth, and before long became one of those girls who haunt servants' offices, and make the unhappy ladies who frequent them eat very humble-pie before they can prevail on one of the independent damsels to enter their service.

Susan might have drifted to worse evil, as many another girl like her has done; but she was free from any tendency to the coarser and darker sins, and her mother, in her way, was a respectable woman. So she did nothing worse than try the patience of one unhappy mistress after another, and disarranged every successive household she entered, leaving each situation on the slightest provocation, and sometimes for no provocation at all. She had now been six weeks installed in Mrs. Williams's kitchen, and had made up her mind to give warning at the end of another fortnight; and as, with the month of her notice, she would have a three months' character, Susan had very little fear of not getting another place as soon as it would suit her convenience to look for one, especially with the very excellent reason that she would have for leaving.

That reason stood before her on the other side of the fireplace. A low-browed, heavy-faced girl of sixteen, with an awkward, ungainly figure, tall, angular, and bony, dressed with a neatness that was an eyesore and affront to Susan, inasmuch as her clothes, being bought and paid for by "missis," the contrast they made to her own was, in Susan's opinion, a reflection on her own taste. Susan felt herself affronted by having such a "partner" in the kitchen. She came of decent people. Hadn't her own father at one time rented an eight-roomed house, and, living in the front kitchen and back attic, let off the rest of the mansion, and paid taxes and poor-rates, out of which such as Margaret Timbs, her present fellow-servant, were supported? For Mrs. Williams, from economical motives, had taken Margaret from the workhouse, and was doing her best to turn her into a tidy hand-maiden. She had been in the house a month, and had smashed, as Susan triumphantly averred, more glass and crockery than a quarter's wages of a decent servant would pay for.

She was sullen and selfish as an untamed animal, and stupid as few animals are,—a girl whose workhouse life had been admirably calculated to deaden everything in her but the mere capacity of living.

She had grown up from babyhood within the Union walls, a creature who had never known caresses or fondling, to whom the baby nonsense mothers and nurses so delight to utter to their little ones was an unknown tongue, to whom kisses were things out of all experience, who had no idea of home or of what it was to have a father and mother. She had learned her Catechism, and knew it by rote—a human parrot. She could read a little, and sew tolerably, and had some notion of the first rudiments of household work.

Beyond this, she knew little of what was good, and had a plentiful knowledge of evil. The vagrant children passing through the workhouse, spending their month or two there while their parents recruited their strength or waited for better times, had given her this knowledge. They were the most amusing companions she had ever known. No wonder that she learned readily all they had to teach.

Some day she might turn this knowledge to account. There were other ways of getting a living than by going to service. If she got tired of Mrs. Williams's place, she might try these ways,—see a little more of the big world of London than Wurtemburg Street would show her. And when she was tired of that, or was in want of food, there was always the workhouse to return to—the workhouse which had been home and parent to her, and would mark her, and claim her, and keep her as its own, with the pauper taint in her blood, and the pauper brand on her name, till her death.

Susan looked up from her crochet. "Why don't you sit down and do something?" she said, impatiently. "You've got holes as big as taters in them new stockings o' yourn." Susan's own deficiencies in stocking mending did not make her less inclined to play the part of mentor to Margaret. "An' you know Mrs. Williams said you was to hem them new tea-cloths she gave you. I hate to see people loblollying about. You'll catch it finely, an' you'll deserve to."

"Don't care," said Margaret, slowly shifting from one foot to the other as she stood by the fireplace. "Don't care a mossel."

"I don't believe you *do*," said Susan, indignantly. "I don't believe you care for a single thing in this world; no, nor a single creature either."

"Nobody never cared for me, why should I care for them?" asked Margaret, calmly.

"You're as unnatural as a brute beast. I never saw anything like it. Why, even a cat cares for its kittens, and a dog has his friends an' his likin's; but *you*—why you don't seem to have a bit of human feelin' in you. Now, is there anything in this world you do care for?" asked Susan, laying down her crochet, and looking up at her companion with some show of interest.

Margaret looked back at her with a little faint amazement breaking through the heavy shadows of her face. Susan's excitement seemed to puzzle her a little. What was there for her to get angry about? Then she said, slowly and deliberately,—"I likes my vittles—barrin' skilley."

"An' nothing else, I do believe," said Susan, looking on the form—which was that of a girl—before her, and wondering how any creature that wore such a shape could have a soul that cared for nothing but "vittles." Susan was faulty enough herself,—vain, flippant, forward, pert, not too fond of work, and, as has been said, apt to change her places on the slightest provocation, or without any provocation whatever. But, at least, she was a human being, fond of her mother, and would go without a ribbon or a new bonnet to take Mrs. Smith home some tea, or her sister some oranges; and would have thought her outing at Easter or Whitsuntide incomplete if she could not have both of them with her; and had once stayed a whole five months in one service to be able to pay for all the party. The thing that stood before her, and had the look of a girl, and as much sense of human kindness or relationship as a machine, as much idea of purity and self-respect as a brute, was incomprehensible to the girl who had, at least, been reared in a home, and to whom the words father and mother were the earliest realities she remembered.

"I think you're right there," she continued. "You're the oddest girl, if you *are* a girl, I ever knew. You don't seem even to care for the children, an' they're not a bad lot here. Miss Brooke keeps them in good order, I will say that. Now, I never could abide a place where there was no children. It makes me downright low sperity to be with nothing but grown-up people."

"Never had nought to do with kids," said Margaret Timbs. "Not since I was one myself. They keep the big girls away from the little uns at the Union. Them that's in the schools ain't aught to do with them that's in the nurseries. We've all our reg'lar places in the Union. Don't know that I ever handled a babby in my life, exceptin' Mary Green's, an' I met her, the last Sunday I was out, with it. She was goin' back to the workhus. Couldn't manage no how to keep it any longer. Hadn't been out of the house a twelvemonth. Said she didn't know as she should care to come out again. The grub isn't very first-rate in the Union, but it's sure, an' the work isn't so hard as it is in service; an' when you've lived all your days there, it seems nateral-like to go back to it. Dessay I shall myself some day, but I should like to have my fling first. Mary's had her fling an' seen something of life, an' anyway the workhus is the best place for her now she's got her babby."

"And where's her husband?" said Susan, severely. "What's he doin' to let her go back to a place like that? I should be ashamed o' namin' on it."

"Husband!" said the girl, with a strange look, half cunning, half something worse, in her face. "We make no count o' husbands, we don't, when we come from the workhus—they ain't for the likes o' us."

"More shame for you!" said Susan, sternly. "A pretty bringing up you've had! All I know is, I like respectable partners wherever I go, an' if you stays here I shall just tell Mrs. Williams she may suit herself with another cook—I'm not used to workhus company."

Margaret took no notice of this outburst. The most "aggravatin' thing" about her, Susan sometimes said, was, that she seemed to

have "no feelin's." There was no moving her. After a while she shifted her position, then seemed to think that she might as well sit down as stand, and, taking a chair, was in a few minutes fast asleep. Susan looked at her contemptuously.

"She's good company. I never had to do with anything so bad in my days. Well, the same place won't hold us much longer, I'm thinkin'. There she'll sit and snore till she has her supper, an' then she'll go upstairs to prayers; an' what the prayers is for I don't believe she knows no more nor a heathen. I never had to do with one of her sort before, an' I won't much longer now, if I can help it."

So the two in the kitchen spent their evening, waiting for the bell that would summon them to the family worship, and the two girls upstairs were spending theirs, each after her own fashion, but each alone and apart from all the household, and especially apart from those other girls, with whom their common youth and common womanhood should, one would have thought, have made her, in some sort at least, akin.

Mrs. Williams' drawing-room was not a luxurious or a very pretty room. The doctor had done his best to furnish it suitably for her when he married, and she tried hard to keep it in some degree of order. There was a round table, which had formerly been in the center of the apartment; but, that arrangement being now voted unfashionable, it was consigned to a corner. There were six walnut chairs, with green rep covers, and a couch to match, a rosewood piano, and one or two smaller articles of furniture. There was a card-case and a stand of wax-flowers on the table, and two or three show-books. There were no fresh flowers—they were a luxury beyond Mrs. Williams' means, and the books had not been renewed since her marriage. Everything looked straight, and spare, and formal, excepting the figure of the one occupant.

This was Millicent Pembury, who was just turned twenty, and heiress to a good house and a landed estate that brought in between three and four thousand a-year, and altogether, as she was not only a wealthy but a beautiful girl, a person of considerable social importance—of such importance, indeed, as to make her seem out of her place in the bare, meager drawing-room of Mrs. Williams.

But Millicent had had a great trouble—a trouble of such a sort as does sometimes befall girls in their teens, or out of them, even if they are beautiful and heiresses; and this trouble had affected her health—so much so, that it was thought advisable she should be placed under the charge of a certain great London physician, famed for his skill in lung diseases, whether they arise from the heart being affected or otherwise; and this had led to her taking up her residence with Mrs. Williams. That lady having been a hanger-on and poor relative of the Pembury family in her youth, Millicent's great-aunt remembered the fact of her existence, when it was convenient to do so.

It was out of the question that she should come to London herself. At her time of life the journey would kill her. And Millicent Pembury, though so well portioned a young lady, had scarcely any relations left but this great-aunt—who only lived to take care of herself, as it seemed—and the poor doctor's wife in Wurtemburg

Street. Mrs. Danvers, the rich relation, thought the poor one would do very well in the emergency, and the little practitioner could see that the great practitioner's prescriptions and directions were all duly carried out. Mrs. Williams was very ready to be useful; the sum she was to receive for Millicent's board would be very acceptable; and she went herself to Hertfordshire and brought Millicent up, only thankful that Millicent was ready to dispense with the services of her maid.

Millicent had been in Wurtemburg Street now about two months. It was her first visit to London, and it had been but a dreary one. There had been no society. What could there be for Miss Pembury, of Pembury Hall, Radley, in Wurtemburg Street, even if she had been well enough for it? There had been no sight-seeing, although, of late, she had been quite well enough for anything of the kind that could have been performed in the daytime, and Mrs. Williams had made a point of telling her repeatedly that "the carriage" was always at her service whenever she would care to use it. There had been no shopping. Millicent had more dresses than she wanted already. There seemed nothing, literally nothing, in all London worth the exertion of lifting up her languid eyes to look upon.

She was better than when she came. There could be no question about that. Her cough had gone; she ate, not as much as a healthy girl should do, but yet enough to account for the fact of her still being in existence, which had not been the case when she first came to Wurtemburg Street. Indeed, Dr. Crane said that she required nothing but change. A winter in the south of France or Algeria would do more for her now than he could. Millicent negatived the idea. Change would be nothing but a trouble—even the journey to London had required more effort than it was worth. She should go back home at Christmas. If Mrs. Williams would be troubled with her, she would prefer staying where she was till then. Mr. Williams told his wife in confidence that nothing ailed the girl but the having too little to do, and too much to do it with. "If she had to work for her living, like poor Miss Brooke, it would be a great deal better for her."

"But the Pemburys never did have to work for their living," said Mrs. Williams. She had been a Pembury herself, and she had to work hard enough now—quite as hard, in her way, as either of her servants or her governess; but then it was not for money, which made all the difference. She did not like the manner in which her husband spoke of her cousin. If she had been the daughter of the butcher or the grocer, tainted with would-be fine-ladyism, he could not have spoken more brusquely. But *brusquerie* was Mr. Williams's great fault, in his wife's opinion. He would never rise above the butchers and the grocers, never obtain a really aristocratic connection, so long as he spoke so freely and so plainly.

Millicent Pembury was altogether out of keeping with her surroundings. She had a rich dark-brown silk, flounced and frilled and trimmed as dresses are now-a-days. Her small, white hands were covered with rings, some of them of great value; but the dress had been bought when Millicent Pembury attached more importance to her personal adornings than she was ever likely to do again; and on one of the hands so listlessly clasped there was one old-world ring of

gold, twisted in the form of a serpent, with a small ruby in the head, for which not a pawnbroker in the kingdom would have given five-and-twenty shillings, that Millicent valued more than all the precious stones and goldsmith's work which had come down to her as heir-looms.

She had beautiful hair, a dark, silky brown, almost black, but with threads of gold gleaming through it—hair of the kind that is ready to break out into curls on the slightest provocation; but it was not arranged in any of the complicated fashions so prevalent now—just twisted up in a great coil, as if its luxuriance was a trouble to its possessor. Not ungracefully disposed, however. Millicent could do nothing ungraceful or awkward. She had some wonderful charm, some innate, unconscious tact about her, which made whatever she did or wore seem the best and fittest thing to be done or worn. Her attitude now, listless, despondent as it was, would have delighted a painter. And it was in keeping with her beauty, which, at its best, was of a fragile, delicate type; with the eyes, that were always subdued in their brightness; with the cheeks, which never warmed into color. She was always pale and shadowy, and looked a creature who would rather endure any amount of suffering than seek a way out of it for herself.

There was a lamp on the table near her: a book which she had been making believe to read; some tatting, at which sometimes she made a pretense of working; and there was a letter which had come by that evening's post, and which she had not yet opened. She took it up now, and glanced at its contents, then laid it down.

"The old, old story. Get well and strong for the sake of others, and the duty I owe myself. If I could please myself, I would just lay my head on my pillow to-night, never to wake up again. Why does one have to live at all when life is so little worth the living? Why didn't I die six months ago, when—when I first knew what I had lost? Get over it! Aunt Danvers's pet phrase. Do girls ever get over such things, and care, or make believe to care, a second time for any one else, and marry, and go through it all, as she would have me? Oh! to feel young, and to know that one must live on, though all the zest and the pleasure of life are taken from it!

"I wonder," she continued, after a pause, "whether I shall tone down and marry, according to my friends' advice, as Aunt Danvers says she did! Aunt Danvers has had her disappointments too," she added, scornfully; "but she has made the best of her life in spite of them, and not found it, in her own opinion, such a bad thing, after all. It's worth while living fifty years more to be another Aunt Danvers! Do people's hearts die, or do some never have hearts at all? Perhaps that was how it was with Aunt Danvers; but for me—for *me* to live to be like her! As if one could forget all that has been, and all that one thought might be, and settle down to an old age of punctilio and physic! I suppose that doctor thinks he has earned my everlasting gratitude by giving me another lease of life. If it hadn't been that it was too much trouble to refuse, I would never have come to London at all. Why should I care to live? What will there be for me when I go back to Radley? It will be as monotonous as it is here, and more fatiguing. One day

just like the other, and nothing, nothing in all the long round to hope for or look forward to."

Upstairs, in the school-room, sat Polly Brooke—Pauline, if one were to give her her proper designation, but nobody did. She was too bright, too pleasant-looking to be called anything but Polly, if she had a name that could by any possibility be turned into that abbreviation. Polly, or Pauline, was rather beneath the middle height, as plump as a girl should be without giving rise to uncomfortable misgivings as to what she might develop into at forty. She had bright eyes, gray or green, of an indeterminate color, a fresh, clear complexion, a nondescript nose, and a mouth that would have been too large if it were not that when she laughed, a very common thing for Polly to do, she showed the whitest and finest of teeth.

The first thing that in Polly Brooke struck an observer was that she looked one of the most sensible and best tempered of girls; and there was an appearance of capability about her, of general handiness and efficiency. She seemed the first person to turn to on any emergency whatever, from a cut finger to a house on fire. The next thing that an observer might see, if with eyes that looked below the surface, would be that, under all Polly's common sense and general efficiency, there was a certain depth of feeling, and a fair share of something very akin to romance. She was shrewd, quick-witted, clever, but with all the potentialities of passion beneath these common-place attributes.

Polly Brooke looked, just now, as if her heart was safely in her own keeping, and not very likely to go out of it. She would never fall in love, because, like a great many young ladies of the past generation, and some few of the present, she had nothing else to do or to think of; but if Polly *did* love, though she might not be so ready to die for her love as Millicent Pembury had been for hers, she would live for it to quite sufficient purpose.

Polly's dress fitted her admirably. It was a black alpaca, and she had made it herself, having a natural genius for dress-making and millinery. On her bright chestnut-brown hair she wore a scarlet bow, and another fastened her little linen collar at the throat. Polly had to be economical. Mrs. Williams gave her just sixteen pounds a year, for which Polly undertook the entire charge of her pupils, wardrobes included, and taught them English, French, and no music. It was her ignorance of the latter accomplishment that had enabled Mrs. Williams to obtain her on such easy terms. Polly did not grumble at the lowness of her salary. Her French not being acquired abroad, and her music being *nil*, she could not expect a first-class situation. Mrs. Williams paid her a fair market value for her services. They were low in the market, but that was not her fault, nor Mrs. Williams's either, who, poor thing, would have found it hard to give her more than she was doing.

Polly was doing three things at once, or nearly so. She was eating an apple with unmistakable relish; she was darning a pair of child's socks; and as she drew her long needlefuls of cotton through her work with the care that good darning requires, she took in a line or two from *Vanity Fair*, which lay open before her. The greatest dearth in Mrs. Williams's household was the dearth of books. The doctor read his *Lancet* and a daily penny paper.

Susan, downstairs, had her penny weekly novels. Mrs. Williams said she had no time for reading at all, but there were two or three "good" books over which she went to sleep, as a matter of duty, every Sunday.

Miss Pembury had brought some volumes of poetry and fiction with her, and, once or twice, had bought a book since her stay; but Polly Brooke would never have dreamed of asking Miss Pembury to lend her anything. Conventionally, they were both young ladies, and, at least, they were girls possessed of some amount of education, intelligence and refinement; but there was a barrier between them almost as great as that which separated either from the occupants of the kitchen, or that one which set Susan, "who came of decent people who had paid poor-rates," above that pariah, her pauper fellow-servant.

Therefore, out of her sixteen pounds a-year, Polly found the money to spare for a book now and then from the adjacent library. The books were old, but the terms were low, and she could not afford Mudie's last new novels—perhaps would not have cared for some of them if she might have had them for the asking; and, after all, one may do worse than be driven, by stress of circumstances—meaning paucity of pence—to Thackeray and Dickens. Polly seemed to think so.

"Done!" she said, as she drew the little sock from her fingers. "Now for Amelia and her George. What a creature for a girl to waste a second thought upon!"

She drew the book to her, and finished her chapter and apple together, enjoying both with equal relish. Then, as she was turning a page, she remembered a little service which she had promised to render Mrs. Williams.

"There's that poor thing's bonnet to do up. I shall just have time before prayers; but one can't read and execute millinery, so good-by, Mrs. Amelia, for the present. No wonder there are such men as George Osborne in the world while there are such fools as yourself to spoil them."

She took the bonnet in question from a cupboard, and began trying what she could do, with the help of a fresh flower and some ironed-out lace, to renovate its appearance.

"I'm glad she's going to have a new one for best, poor thing! and another silk dress. There's some good in Miss Pembury's staying here; she'd have neither, else. What a sad mess of her life that little woman has made of it, to be sure! What a scraping and saving, contriving, and pinching it is! I wonder what she married for? She's worse off than I am. She has more to do, and more to worry her, and not so much money to spend on herself as even I have. Besides, I'm not supposed to dress; and in dress, as in everything else, there is the everlasting necessity of 'keeping up appearances,' for a poor doctor's wife. And what did she get into it all for?" asked Polly of some invisible auditor, as she twisted the bonnet round and eyed it critically. "It *couldn't* have been for love. Fancy any one loving, really *loving*, Mr. Williams! It must just have been for the sake of a home,—and not much of a home after all,—or the feeling of being married, which some women seem to think is all they come into the world for. So do some men

too. Mr. Tomlyn is one of them. I suppose Mrs. Williams means to be very good-natured when she asks me into the drawing-room when he comes, and tells me he's a marrying man. He told me so once himself, and looked—ah! I'd have given my best pair of gloves to have boxed his ears for that look. I shouldn't wonder but Mr. Tomlyn sometimes thinks he'll do me the honor of marrying *me!* Well, there are easier ways of getting one's living than marrying; for if one takes a housekeeper's situation in that way, one can't give warning and leave if one finds the master is too hard to please. There's the bell for prayers. Well, Mrs. Williams, I've done the bonnet, and, considering this is its fourth winter, I don't think it is so much amiss."

CHAPTER II.

SO NEAR AND SO APART.

When Polly Brooke came down into the hall, she found Miss Pembury at the door, and Susan and Margaret ready to follow the young lady into the dining-room. Susan rather approved of family prayers. They were a sign of respectability, and she always kept a clean, freshly-starched apron ready to put on for the occasion. Margaret, or Madge, as she was known in the household, stood by without a sign of interest in her stolid face. She was finishing the last mouthful of her supper,—munching deliberately, slowly munching, much as an animal ruminates.

"You might have finished by this," said Susan, who was taking in every flounce and bow on Miss Pembury's handsome dress. She had not seen this one before, and Miss Pembury's toilets were daily delights to Susan. She wondered how much the dressmaker to whom she intrusted her own "costumes" would charge her for one like this. She was examining every point and fold of her dress the whole time of prayers. She behaved well, outwardly, and said her 'Amens' in a manner that did her credit; and as soon as she was in the kitchen, gave Madge a lecture for not saying 'Amen' at all. "One would think you was a heathen instead o' bein' brought up in a Christun country, to see you," said Susan. "I never see such a critter in my life!"

"What's the good of it all?" asked Madge. "One gets tired o' the stuff. There's such a precious lot of it in th' Union. I didn't think I was bound to stand prayers when I went out to service. I sha'n't, nayther," she said, sullenly; "it's a kind o' thing I didn't look for when I came out."

"You're a nice one to talk of what you'll stand!" said Susan, contemptuously. "You're not like a girl that's always kept herself respectable, an' got a good character to fall back upon, and cum of people that had a house o' their own, an' paid rates to keep such as you in idleness. I can have my pick whenever I goes to an office, an' I takes care to let the ladies see I know my own vally. That's only proper pride. But *you*—what'll you do if you throw yourself out o' this? There'll be no pickin' an' choosin' for you."

"If I don't get a place to my mind, I'll have my fling somehow,"

said Madge; "an' there's always the Union to go back to. They're bound to take me in," she added cunningly. "I'll never kill myself with work, I know, as long as I've that to fall back on."

Mrs. Williams read the prayers, for it was never certain that Mr. Williams might not be called away before they were concluded. She was a thin, anxious-looking woman, of forty, though her eldest child was only nine years old. She had married late; but Mr. Williams came in her way when nobody else seemed likely to do so. He had been assistant to the principal surgeon near Radley, and had sometimes, when his principal was ill, called at the Hall, and she had met him in the village when employed in carrying out Mrs. Danvers's benefactions. The match was beneath her, Mrs. Danvers said. It was an outrage on all the proprieties for a Pembury to marry a country doctor, or, indeed, a doctor at all; and the Pembury in question certainly did not care very much for the doctor. But she was tired of being a hanger-on, of having no definite occupation and no certain home, and therefore she took the doctor, with every intention of making him as good a wife as if she had been as much in love with him as, ten or twelve years before this, she would have thought it indispensable she should be with the man she married.

They came to London. Mrs. Danvers made her kinswoman a present of a hundred pounds toward furniture, some cracked old china, and a piano, which was equally cracked. Mr. Williams bought a fourth-rate practice, and they settled in Wurtemburg Street. Mr. Williams himself took matters much more easily than his wife. *He* had not to solve the daily problem of how to make every ninepence go as far as a shilling. He worked hard, and contrived to make enough to pay for the brougham, his life insurance, house-rent and taxes, and to give Mrs. Williams a certain sum for housekeeping. But how that very limited sum was to cover all the thousand-and-one expenses of the household, and invest the daily life with something of grace and decency, was a problem that never troubled him, but which it was the daily task and nightly care of his wife to solve—not always effectually.

He was a large-made, florid man, a little older than his wife, with a loud voice, and an abrupt manner,—not at all the doctor to make his way into a "good" connection, or suit nervous ladies, or fanciful patients. But he was fairly clever and kind-hearted, only people would not credit a man who talked so loud and made so light of their lesser ailments with being half so clever or so well-meaning as he really was; therefore he never got into the higher circles of Bloomsbury, and was never likely to be able to leave it for a more aristocratic quarter.

He did not fret about this very much himself. He was a man who never fretted about anything. He had an excellent appetite, a good digestion, and nerves of iron, and he took everything very easily, except being knocked up in the night or called away from his dinner. But he always did get up when the night-bell rang, and rarely stayed to finish his dinner, even if it was his favorite roast pork, with stuffing. As to Mrs. Williams's difficulties, he did not understand them any more than men in general do understand the difficulties even of the women they know the best and see the most

of. He gave her as much as he could for housekeeping, and numbers of women had to do with less; and the stress and the strain, the wear and tear of nerves and mind, involved in making it suffice at all were a matter wholly beyond his ken.

The children were always sent to bed before prayers, so that there were only the four girls and the master and mistress of the house assembled in the dining-room. It was a meager, sparely furnished room—more meager and unlovely even than the drawing-room; for the carpet was almost worn into holes, and the curtains had faded into unrecognizable colorlessness. And there was none of the home feeling, the warm air of hearty vitality, that sometimes makes a homely, shabby room so homelike and so genial. Mrs. Williams had not the gift which some women, however stinted in their means, possess of surrounding herself with a genial atmosphere. All the stint and the care, the striving to bridge over a bottomless chasm which is called "making both ends meet," was so constantly with her, that an uneasy sense of privation seemed to pervade every room, but especially this, the ordinary living room of the household.

While Susan and Madge downstairs had the little dialogne I have given, Miss Pembury bade her hostess good-night with her usual listlessness; then slowly wound her way up the stairs to her own room. Her movements were so languid, her eyes and whole bearing so dejected, that Polly Brooke, following her, felt as if only illness could account for such a manner. Miss Pembury was always slow and listless; but to-night she seemed so much more so than usual, that Polly broke through her usual rule of keeping the same distance toward Miss Pembury that the latter maintained toward her, and said,—

"You don't seem at all well. Can I do anything for you? Let me come into your room and help you to undress."

"Thanks; I am much as usual; only a little tired. I have been out to-day. No, there is no occasion to trouble you. Good-night, Miss Brooke."

The manner was polite and well-bred. It would have been impossible for Millicent Pembury's manner to have been anything else. But there was a slight shade of *hauteur* in it which made Polly feel as if, in putting herself forward as she had done to assist Miss Pembury, she was considered to have taken a liberty. Gentle and courteous as Millicent was, Polly had always felt that the young lady was fully aware of the difference between their stations. It was not so much that Polly was a governess, no, nor even that she took such entire charge of her pupils as to save Mrs. Williams the expense of a nurse; for ladies, if not sufficiently educated for higher situations, had sometimes to take similar posts to Miss Brooke's, or be useful companions, as Mrs. Williams, when Sarah Pembury, had been to Mrs. Danvers, when she had performed more unpleasant duties than dressing children and keeping their clothes in order. But Polly's father had kept a shop. It did not matter to Millicent that it was a chemist's. A little money more or less would have made no difference in her caste; but this was trade, ugly, vulgar, ignoble trade—trade that pushed its way into high places, and jostled and elbowed the better born, and held that wealth was the

be-all and end-all of this life—and it was as the pariah brand in the eyes of Mrs. Danver's niece. She had imbibed two or three prejudices from her aunt, and this was certainly one of them.

"I wonder what made me speak to her?" said Polly, when in the room which she shared with her two younger pupils. "Why couldn't I have let her ask for help if she wanted it! I don't want to be taught my place. I'm quite aware that I am only the governess, and the "nursery" governess, too, Miss Pembury. A plain little body, with no accomplishments to speak of, and nothing but my head and my hands to help me on in the world. And you are rich, and so beautiful that it is a treat to only look upon you. One hasn't so many pretty things in this world. And with all your money and all your beauty you don't know how to get any real good out of your life. And I pity you with all my heart, Miss Pembury; but for myself, while I have the aforesaid head and hands, and the health to use them, I don't pity myself a bit."

And if Polly Brooke could have seen Millicent Pembury then and there, she would have pitied her yet more. She had flung herself on the first chair she came to, when she had placed her candle on the table, and there she sat, as if the labor of undressing would be more than the night's repose was worth.

"You won't want Jenkins," said Mrs. Danvers, who had dispensed with a regular attendant herself, when her niece had become of an age to require the services of a more dexterous tire-woman and hair-dresser than the old nurse who had been attending her from infancy. "Jenkins can fill up her time here with your new under linen: it never does with this class of servants to take them to small houses like the Williams's. She would give herself airs, and make poor Sarah very uncomfortable, and, perhaps, give warning before she had been in the house a week. And it's not a place where you need dress. I don't suppose they keep much company. I don't see how they can, poor things! and, at any rate, Sarah would never expect you to join their society, and you'll find her very useful. I've no doubt she'll be quite willing to come in of a night and brush your hair and put away your dress—indeed, I always considered her quite as handy as I ever found Jenkins."

Millicent wanted no Jenkins with her. Her maid knew her story, that dreadful story—none the less shameful, so it seemed to her, because it was the story of another's sin. She did not want Jenkins to be noting her looks and words, and speculating as to whether her mistress "was getting over her disappointment"; but she gave Mrs. Williams very little trouble, feeling only too thankful to be left in peace and alone. She wanted no eyes looking on her in her misery: what had to be borne had best be borne alone.

She unfastened her hair almost mechanically, and it fell down in great dark waves over her shoulders. She passed its length through her fingers, thinking how one other had once praised its luxuriance. Then she flung it from her impatiently.

"Another day gone, another day, and how many more to come! Years of such days—years and years, if I live to be as old as Aunt Danvers, and, perhaps, be nothing *but* an Aunt Danvers, after all! Why couldn't they have left me alone? If I had never known, Horace might have been all that they said he was—all that I *know*

he was; and yet I should have been happy in my blindness. I never wanted my eyes opened; what did they do it for? Why did they tell me the truth, when I would have died a thousand times sooner than have known it?"

Then Millicent Pembury flung herself on her knees, not to pray, but to weep. Polly Brooke's bright eyes had shed tears enough in their time, but never such tears as these. For it was no grief over the dead taken away just when they seemed most worthy of all love and honor—no wailing over a parting that could never be eternal if there were a God to believe in and a future life to hope for. Ah, well for those who have known no bitterer grief than that we feel for the dead! But Millicent Pembury's idol was covered with no grave dust—shattered, disowned, dishonored, there it lay, a thing so utterly abased and broken, that even in the weakest hours of her grief she dared not hope ever to build it up again.

She moaned herself to sleep in her lonely misery. Polly Brooke lay awake upstairs, equally alone, though not so miserable, thinking how glad she should be now and then of some companionship more intelligent than that of the children, and more congenial than that of poor, anxious, harassed Mrs. Williams. In the back attic, on a flock bed, not at all of the widest for two, were Susan and Margaret—as far apart as those two others, in spite of their apparent proximity.

"Don't go a-kickin' like that," said Susan; "keep your legs to yourself, if you please. Well, my father never thought, when he paid his rates regular, that ever I should come to be bedfellow with a girl from the parish. An', by the way you're goin on, it won't be long before you're back to it."

"I'll have my fling first," said Madge, in the thick, heavy monotone of her voice; "an' as like as not I shall go back there; but I'll have my fling. What was the good o' comin' out o' the Union else?"

CHAPTER III.

MR. WILLIAMS'S SLUMBERS ARE BROKEN.

Mr. Williams sat by the remains of the fire, when the rest of the household were in their respective apartments, sipping the glass of gin-and-water which was his nightly solace when the labors of the day were over, and the family devotions had been performed. His wife leaned back in her chair, with the anxious look that always pervaded her face, intensified, if possible. "Millicent does not seem to me to be getting any better," she said. "I think she is breaking her heart for that young Gordon."

"Her lungs are all right, whatever her heart may be," said Mr. Williams; "and there's more vitality in her than you've any idea of. She has a splendid constitution. The only pity is she hasn't got to get her living—there'd be no talk of her dying in that case."

"The Pemburys were never strong," said Mrs. Williams, who thought it a mark of high breeding to be delicate.

"*Aren't* they? Look at old Danvers. If she'd do with half as much food and a third less sleep, she'd live to ninety. As it is, she

has done her threescore and ten, and, bar accidents, Milly will make just such another. She wouldn't have been ill now if she couldn't have afforded it. A girl with such a chest as hers has no right to have anything wrong with her lungs. Her cough was half nervousness, half fancy. If she'd been a housemaid, she'd never have had it at all; she'd have slighted her work for a week or so, got a scolding from her mistress, or, may be, warning, and looked out for another place and another young man. Dying, indeed! All the dying she would have done would have been her ribbons; and if the last fellow liked them pink, she'd have had them blue for the new one."

Mrs. Williams gave no answer, but a little sigh. She and her husband were never at one when the Pembury peculiarities were in question. She waited meekly till he had finished his gin-and-water, and then, lighting her candle, was about to go upstairs, when the night-bell rang loudly.

"Confound it!" said Mr. Williams. "I was called up at three this morning, and I suppose to-night I'm to be kept up to the same hour. The girls are in bed too, so I must go myself, I suppose."

Mr. Williams went, and saw an anxious husband at the door, who informed him that Mrs. Johnson was in immediate need of his services. He was not surprised, but told Mrs. Williams not to sit up for him. "It's just as I said; I *sha'n't* get to bed till three in the morning. Why couldn't the woman have let me have my night's rest in peace?"

Mrs. Williams went to bed alone, and Mr. Williams joined her about the hour he had named.

"Don't keep breakfast waiting, I sha'n't be down till ten," he said, drowsily. "I must take it out at one end if I can't at the other. Johnson's got another boy; that makes seven, counting both sorts. Wish him joy of his quiver full. Hope he won't keep me waiting for my bill so long this Christmas as he did the last."

Then Mr. Williams slept and snored, and Mrs. Williams, resolving that his slumbers should not be disturbed the next morning, relapsed into her own. But her good intentions on her lord's behalf were frustrated, for, before seven o'clock had sounded from the church in the neighboring square, a knocking so violent on the bedroom door as to show that whoever made it was too much in earnest to think of their knuckles, was heard, and then Susan's voice, in shrill and urgent tones,—

"Please, sir, you're wanted; there's not a minute to lose. It's a baby, sir, an' it's dead, an' the father and mother's nigh distracted, an' they've brought it to you to see what can be done. Oh, please, sir, make haste, or the mother 'ill screech the house down."

"If it's dead, what's the use of troubling," said Mr. Williams, turning drowsily on his other side.

"Oh, please, sir, be quick; she's a takin' on dreadful. She overlaid it in the night, an' found it dead when she got up."

"Took too much gin before she went to bed," said Mr. Williams, his own gin and water not troubling his conscience in the least.

"Oh, Miss Pembury, wouldn't you like to see it? Miss Brooke, it's the loveliest little babby, an' a girl, an' the poor mother's feel-

in's is dreadful. She's down in the surgery, screechin' the house down. It's awful to hear her."

Millicent had come to the door of her bedroom, wrapped up in her dressing-gown, and Susan turned eagerly to her in the hope of finding an interested auditor. Her own sympathies were roused to the utmost. The sight of the baby, and the mother's noisy grief, had stirred her heart, and it was warmer even than her temper. Besides, Susan was ready for anything in the way of excitement that came in her way. Polly Brooke was descending the stairs; she was neatly dressed, as usual, and ready for the day's work, which she was just about to commence by rousing her pupils and attending to their toilets, when Susan's outcries met her ear.

"A dead baby, Susan! No, surely, or they would never have brought it here. There must be some hope, or they wouldn't have troubled Mr. Williams."

"Come down and see for yourself, Miss," said Susan. "It's as dead as ever it will be; but, of course, it will be a satisfaction to have shown it to the doctor. Besides, it may save an inquest, which is always tryin' to the feelin's."

Mr. Williams now made his appearance at the door of his room, having made a very hasty toilet. He looked sleepy still, and rather cross at being disturbed. "If it *is* dead, what's the use of bringing it here?" he said testily. Then seeing Polly, he added—"Come along, Miss Brooke; if there's life left I may be able to make you useful."

Polly followed him downstairs. Susan came next, her heart all in a flutter, she declared. Millicent Pembury returned to her room. "I may as well dress," she said, languidly. "It's not worth while going to bed again. I shall only be down a quarter of an hour before breakfast instead of a quarter after."

The baby and its father and mother were in the surgery, a small room at the end of the passage, which it was the duty of Madge to keep in order. She was pretending to dust it now, going from one shelf to another with her duster, then stopping to look at the group in the room. Death had neither terrors nor mystery for her. The dead-house in the Union was a common-place reality enough. When people were dead, there was an end of them, and once they had had "their fling," and seen a little of this world, there was not much to be got by staying longer in it. But the man who had brought the child looked more concerned than Madge would have thought anybody need be about a baby; and as to the woman, who now held it in her arms, and rocked herself violently to and fro, her outcries were beyond any that Madge had ever heard.

"They makes a deal o' fuss about the kid. I should have thought they'd have been glad to have been rid o' the bother," was her half contemptuous thought.

Mr. Williams came brusquely in. "Don't make such a noise, my good woman; it's deafening, and enough to kill the child, if it isn't dead already. Here, Miss Brooke, will you take it from her, and bring it to the light?"

Polly obeyed. She had helped the doctor before now when there had been trying cases in his surgery. He had said of her that she had neither nerves nor nonsense, and had the making of a first-class

nurse in her. She took the little creature now, and went to the window with it. The cold, gray light of the early winter morning was struggling through, and fell on its little features. It was a small, delicately-made child of three months—so small, so pretty, that it seemed as if it could not be the offspring of the rough-looking man in bricklayer's fustian, and the blowsy, disheveled woman, with her red face, made redder by her noisy grief, who had brought it there. Susan came forward, and looked on it pitifully. "Pretty lamb! it's taken out of its troubles early."

Madge stopped in the midst of dusting a shelf, and looked at Susan as if her pity was incomprehensible to her, which it was.

Mr. Williams put his ear down to the child's heart and mouth, tried to pour some restorative down its throat, opened the blue eyes and peered into them; then turned to the woman.

"How did this happen?" he said, with some severity in his tone.

"Took it to bed with me, last night," said the woman, speaking in a strong Irish accent, "an' the darlin' was as well as ever it was in its life, an' this mornin' I found it just as you see by the side o' me. Och hone! an' it's on'y three months since I lost Mick, the finest babby that ever one set eyes on; an' now this, that I took in its place, an' to oblidge the poor mother, who said she didn't know where on airth to find any one that 'ud do their duty by it, is gone. An' what'll the childer do for their playfellow, an' what'll I say to her when next I set eyes on her?"

"She won't be comin' nigh you this month, an' ye're paid all that beforehand," said her husband, by way of consolation.

"An' it isn't the dirty money I was thinkin' of, Mick," answered his wife, indignantly, "or would I ever have taken the darlin' for as low as four shillin's a-week, lettin' it tie up my hands so that I've hardly had time to do a hand's turn for the other childer? Oh, docther, dear, don't say it's dead. How can I ever go back to my place widout it?"

"It's as dead as a door-nail," said Mr. Williams, bluntly. Perhaps he would have measured his words more if he had been addressing the real mother. "And you've only yourself to thank for it. What did you take the child to bed with you for, if you're such a heavy sleeper that you couldn't take proper care of it? There isn't a week but some woman burkes a baby to death in this fashion; and they'll never get over it till one or two are hung as a caution to the rest."

The woman burst into a fresh paroxysm of grief, swaying herself violently to and fro.

"I can't do anything," said Mr. Williams, addressing her husband. "You'd better take the child away."

"Divil a bit," said the man, with a *brusquerie* equal to the doctor's own. "I'm not for handlin' a dead body."

"Then your wife must take it," said Mr. Williams. "I can't have the child here."

"Oh, how will I ever be able to carry you back, my darlin', and know that it's dead you are all the while?" shrieked the woman, beating herself wildly with her arms, but making no motion to take the child which Polly Brooke gently tendered her.

"It will be no more to take away than it was to bring," said the doctor. "I can't see to the burial, you know."

"The buryin'! Oh! an' it's you has the heart of a stone to be namin' anythin' of the kind," shrieked the woman. "Oh, mavourneen! an' is he talkin' of hidin' your purty face in the cold ground? Is it that that I brought you to him for? Mick, if you're a man, take me out of this! Shure, he's not a grain o' feelin' or he'd never talk o' buryin' like that. No, I can't take it, miss; I can't!" and she almost pushed Polly from her. "The weight o' death would carry me to the ground wid it."

"Come home, Molly, an' let's see what I can do for you," said her husband, sympathetically. "Shure your feelins is killin' you."

"Yes, get me back to my oder darlins; the sight o' them will comfort me. Oh, worra, mavourneen! that I'll never see your blue eyes again."

And in a whirlwind of grief, as they had come in one, the disconsolate foster-parents of the baby dashed out of the house, leaving it on Mr. Williams's hands, and literally in the arms of Polly Brooke.

"Confound the hussy! she's done it on purpose," said the doctor. "A planned thing, I should say, to saddle me with the funeral of the child, only that it must have been dead too short a time for them to concoct any regular scheme. Now, I shall have to go to the workhouse about the funeral, and have all those thick-headed vestrymen grinning at me Put the child on the table, Miss Brooke, cover it up, and let's get some breakfast. I meant to have had an extra hour or two in bed this morning, but instead of that I must go and see how I'm to dispose of this. We'll leave it here, Susan, and if any patients come before it's removed, show them into the back dining-room."

Mr. Williams went upstairs to finish his toilet, preparatory to his breakfast, and Polly and Susan placed the little one on the table that was in the center of the room. They removed the litter of papers and books that was on it, so as to make its temporary resting-place a more seemly one. Then Polly went to the linen-closet to fetch a clean white cloth to cover it with, and Susan stooped and kissed it gently.

"Pretty dear! it's hardly cold yet. Now, what are you garpin' for?" she added, turning fiercely on Madge, who stood with the duster in her hand looking stolidly at the baby.

"It's like a great wax doll," she said; "but it's prettier than Mary Green's."

"Don't you name Mary Green's child and that little angel together!" said Susan, still more fiercely. "I don't know, though," she added, more quietly; "it's only a nurse-child, and there was no talk of a father. It's no better than Mary Green's, I dare say, and best off where it is, poor lamb."

Polly came back with the cloth, and laid it gently over the still little face. "You'd best come away," said Susan to Madge, as she followed Miss Brooke out of the room.

"I've got my dusting to finish," said the girl, with her usual stolidity. "I don't want to be rowed at again to-day about it."

"An' you'll stop here, an' go on with your work just as if noth-

ing had happened, and with that dead babby in the room?" said Susan, opening her eyes with almost horror.

"A dead babby's quieter nor a livin' one, an' ain't likely to hinder me," said Madge. "She jawed at me yesterday about those shelves, an' I don't want her to do it again to-day. There's that top one I ain't touched yet."

"Well, shut the door after you when you come away," said Susan. "Just hear her, miss," she added, turning to Polly; "she makes no more count o' the poor little angel than if it was a dead puppy. She don't seem like a human being."

"Workhouses don't rear them," said Polly, sententiously; "but don't you think, Susan, it would be possible to turn her into one?"

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THEY WERE BROUGHT TOGETHER.

MADGE went on with her dusting. She had a little dull, heavy pride in the performance of such household work as was assigned her. The finer portions of a housemaid's duties were beyond her; but she could scrub floors, scour tins, and blacklead stoves in a style that more accomplished handmaidens would not have equaled.

And she did not like to be found fault with about her work, and Mrs. Williams having reprimanded her yesterday for the state of the book-shelves at one end of the study, Madge was resolved that there should be no cause for such fault-finding to-day. A great many things besides books were on these shelves: cases of surgical instruments, gallipots, vials, rolls of paper, bill files; so that it took Madge some time to do her work thoroughly, especially as she was never disposed to hurry over anything she did. But she had nearly finished, there was only a corner of the lowest shelf to complete, when a slight noise made her turn her head toward the table on which the baby had been left.

It was the faintest, slightest sound—not a cry, it was too weak, and yet more than a sigh; and it came from beneath the white cloth which had been thrown over the little quiet thing upon the table. Madge stood and stared at it, and then—there could be no mistake now—the noise was repeated. She went toward the table, and, half afraid, with a blind, ignorant fear of she knew not what, took off the cloth and looked upon the baby that had been left for dead.

Had life come back? Come back from whence and how? The little mouth was quivering, the tiny hands were moving, and yet the baby had been left for dead.

"As dead as ever it could be," said Madge.

Of death, the still, white, cold, grim thing called by that name, she had no dread. It had been too familiarized to her. All the sanctity and the state that surrounds the fearful visitor even in the humblest cottage home, she knew nothing of. The hushed step, the speaking with bated breath, the kindly condolences, the visits of sympathizing neighbors, were never to be seen in the factory that had turned her out, as it turned out so many others, to drift for a time in the world, and then find their way back to its walls. She

had been in the infirmary for months, and had seen one dead child or woman taken away after another, and it had seemed a matter-of-course thing that they should die and be done with when their turn came. Die as did the cats and the dogs, only that they had a little better burial. Children she had known taken away from the ranks of the school and never brought back again, and they, too, had died —turned, she supposed, into the stiff, cold, motionless things that had sometimes lain for hours in the next bed to the one she had occupied in the infirmary. That was what dying meant. To be white, cold, stiff, still, deaf, dumb, blind, and never trouble anybody more, and never be troubled by anyone. When people died they were done for, and there was an end of them. Once dead, they never spoke or stirred.

As to coming back after death Madge had read her Bible in class, verse and verse in turn; it had been read aloud too in chapel, but she was none the better for its teschings. They were above her altogether. As a child, she had a dim dread of hell-fire as a sort of torment which might await her in the future; but all such fancies had been laughed out of her by the birds of passage who had taken up their winter quarters in the workhouse.

"They were just a pack o' parson's lies. Parsons an' beaks an' the Board knew what they were about when they tried to gammon with that stuff." This kind of lesson stuck by Madge better than did the chaplain's. But of late she had pretty well forgotten both, and settled down into a dull materialism. Spiritual and moral faculties were alike enveloped in a fog. Even superstition was unknown to her. There was not imagination enough in her for it.

But something like fear—or should we call it awe?—woke in her dull, sluggish nature now. This child had died, and yet it was not dead. Life did not end with death then? And from whence did life come? The little baby struggling faintly for the existence it had so nearly lost, was a terrible mystery to the poor, crushed, imperfect soul that looked upon it. She could not move or stir, but stood staring, with wide-open eyes and mouth, a queer, grotesque image of dread and terror, when Susan came to the door to tell her breakfast was ready.

"What are you staring there for? Why you've uncovered the poor darling! Couldn't you let it rest in peace!" she said, sharply, coming up to the side of Madge. "Why, as I'm a sinner, it stirs, it moves, it *lives!* Oh! oh! oh!" And Susan sank into the nearest chair, and went into hysterics.

The sound reached the ears of Mr. Williams, who was just coming down the stairs ready for his breakfast. He was wide awake now, which he had hardly been when the baby had been first brought to his house, and was fresh and florid from his bath. Mrs. Williams followed him, her housekeeping troubles on her mind, and her keys in her hand. The day, with its little cares and worries had begun for her. Polly Brooke came next with her four pupils, the youngest—a saucy, rosy boy of four years old, Polly's especial delight and torment—in her arms. Polly had a habit of caressing and cuddling children,—"getting all the fun she could out of them," as she expressed it. She was quite ready for her day's work too, and would find a great deal more enjoyment in it than Mrs. Williams

would. Then came Millicent Pembury, slowly, listlessly, as if the burden of the day before her would be too much to endure; and to all these the hysterical screams of Susan ascended as they came down the stairs.

"What's up now?" said the doctor, testily. "Trod on a mouse, or seen a cockchafer? Take the children in, and give them their breakfast, Sarah—I'll be with you presently."

They never had family prayers at Mr. Williams's of a morning, they were liable to too many interruptions; besides, Mr. Williams rarely made his appearance till the meal was over, and, the kettle being on the hob, Mrs. Williams was able to make the coffee without requiring the attendance of either of her handmaidens, which, in the present circumstances, as Polly's pupils all wanted their breakfast, was fortunate.

"Oh, oh, oh! it lives, it lives, it lives!" sounded through the house.

"Just come with me, Miss Brooke," said the doctor. "I do believe there's something up with that confounded baby!"

"If it *is* alive after all, what shall we do with it?" moaned Mrs. Williams, feebly.

"Send it to the workhouse; they won't catch me keeping it," said her husband, as he made his way to the surgery.

Millicent Pembury followed Polly thither, regardless of Mrs. Williams's entreaties that she would stay to breakfast. Millicent had not always been so wrapped up in her own troubles as she was now, and, for a moment, she seemed inclined to forget them, and show a little interest in the household disturbances. When they came to the surgery, Susan was still crying almost as violently as the baby's foster-mother had done, while Madge stood by the side of the child, looking on it with, for once, a human look lighting up her features. It was dread, and awe, and interest; but the heavy inert stupidity, which it would be an insult to our four-footed relations to call animal, had passed away. Polly saw *that* look before she did the child. Mr. Williams turned at once to the baby. The little lips wore a natural color now instead of the livid blueness they had worn. The deadly paleness had passed from the skin, and the little chest was heaving with the faint efforts it was making to cry. One glance was enough for Mr. Williams.

"Get a hot bath," he said, contemptuously. "The thing's alive. Who's got enough sense to draw some hot water?"

Susan's hysterics vanished in a second.

"Little lamb! To think of its being alive after all. I'll get a bath in a minute, sir."

Polly Brooke took the little creature on her lap, and began to undress it. Madge stood looking on the while.

"Run into the children's room," said Polly, "and bring me a little blanket, and the softest towel you can find."

For once, Madge did run, and came back with the articles required. The necessity of doing something had dispelled her fears, and she looked intelligent and almost happy as she gave them to Polly. Susan appeared with the bath, and baby, two minutes after immersion, uttered so shrill and strong a cry, that it was clear that, for this time at least, neither its life nor its lungs were in danger.

"That'll do," said the doctor. "Keep it wrapped up in the blanket for a minute or two, then dress it, and give it a little milk-and-water. When breakfast is over, I must go to the workhouse about it. Miss Pembury, don't you want your breakfast? I'm sure I want mine."

"I'll stay and see how the little one gets on," said Millicent.

Madge looked up at her. "Where did the life come from to get back into it?" she asked.

"God knows whether the life will prove a blessing," said Millicent, sadly; and Madge looked as if about to relapse into her normal state of torpidity.

"Come and rub its feet, Madge," said Polly. "They're not as warm as I should like them to be."

Down Madge went before one wonderful little foot, and Susan before another. "Let me, oh! do let me, Miss Brooke," said the latter. "Precious lamb! To think of its having had such an escape as this! Lovely little tootlums! An' does it like to be rubbed, does it? Bess it a peshus! Lord love its little heart, it's smiling!"

"It'll leave that off if it gets in th' Union," said Madge, with a matter-of-fact grimness. She was rubbing the little foot the while, but the baby gibberish that Susan so delighted in was an unknown tongue to her. It had never met her own infant ears. Fond words and fonder kisses, all that mothers, however poor and hardly worked, can give their children, she had never had. She looked on Susan now with a little surprise. "It didn't understand you, did it?"

"Oh it knows, it does. There's a deal of sense in babies," said Susan, fumbling at the little foot.

"An' it's got to go to the Union!" said Madge, with something like pity in her tone. She had asked where the life had come from to the baby. As Polly looked at her, she wondered how this new life had come to her.

Millicent came and bent over the child. "It's a pretty little thing," she said. "It does seem a pity it should ever come to that."

"You would say so if you knew something of workhouse children," said Polly; "London workhouse children especially."

"I wish I could keep it," said Susan. "I'm sure I would, if I could afford it; but what can one do out of twelve pounds a-year?"

"The pretty, dainty little darling!" cried Polly; "and to think of its ever coming to be like the children I have seen!"

"Just let me hold it in my arms a minute, miss," said Madge. "I never held a little one afore. We was always kept away from 'em in th' Union."

Polly placed the child in her arms, and Madge took it with a little awkwardness, but much of uncouth tenderness. Her face changed: a strange light was breaking through its sullen gloom; the lips quivered and the eyes moistened, and presently the tears fell fast upon the little baby face.

"She's too good for the workhus. She didn't have the life come back to her to be made just the same as the likes of us."

"That girl's got some feelin', after all," cried Susan. "Who'd have thought it?"

"The likes of us!" Polly knew what she meant. The unchild-like children who take their dreary walks in processions through the streets of London, with faces stamped with a gravity that would be unnatural in age, and is horrible in youth. Faces from which all the light and the joy and the playfulness of childhood is gone. Children to whom the wiles and the merriment of infancy are unknown, with souls stunted because no love has ever been given them to feed on,—minds dwarfed because the affection and the tenderness on which such minds should be nurtured have never been theirs to know—or old in all the cunning and the devilry that can hinder all chance of pure and wholesome growth. Baby would have been better with the angels than to have been one of these.

"I wish," said Millicent, with a little hesitation, "that we could save baby from the workhouse." For the moment, the four girls, so dissimilar in fortunes and characters, were "we," with one common interest between them. "I would willingly undertake the expense, but I know of no one to whom I could give the little creature."

"I do!" cried Susan, exultingly. "It's the very thing mother's been wishing for. She's gone out Homerton way. Mile End was so close, she said, there was no bearing it, an' she's got a tidy room in a nice airy street. It isn't far from the Victoria Park either. Jane could take baby there sometimes, when her back would let her—she's weak in the spine, miss; but, anyhow, mother and she would see that it didn't want for fresh air; an' whatever you thought fit to give, miss, would satisfy mother, an' I know she'd do her duty by it."

Milly looked at Polly. Turning to her for counsel as she would never have thought last night she could have turned to the nursery governess whose people had been in trade,—Polly answered the look.

"I should think, from what I have seen of Susan, her mother would do well by the child; at least it seems the best arrangement that can be made for it at present, Miss Pembury, if you are really going to provide for its future."

"Then if you would take it to your mother, Susan, when Mrs. Williams can spare you. But you must let me know where she lives, and I'll come and see it sometimes."

"East Street, Homerton, not far from Hackney church-yard. You get to it by the North London or the 'bus. But I beg your pardon, miss; of course, you never go by 'buses."

"*I* do though, Susan; and if Miss Pembury likes, I'll go and see your mother and baby soon. *You* may not be well enough to go so far just yet, Miss Pembury."

"Thank you, thank you. I should be glad if you would settle the first arrangements for me. And it will want a little outfit, poor mite," said Milly, with a pitying smile, that showed Polly how much loveliness her face was capable of expressing. "It has not much of a wardrobe."

"Only give mother a few yards of calico and flannel, miss, and she'll soon see to that," said Susan, eagerly. "She's handy at her

needle, an' works at times for a baby-linen house. But she was wishing for a nurse-child now she's got into such a nice airy part."

"Perhaps Mrs. Williams could spare Susan and me together," said Polly. "The children are going to their grandma's this afternoon; then I could settle everything for you."

"If you would be so good," said Milly. And so the matter was arranged, and Susan carried baby off triumphantly to the kitchen, and Milly and Polly went at last to their breakfast.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. SMITH AT HOME.

THAT afternoon saw Polly and Susan seated in a second-class carriage on the North London line, baby on Susan's lap, and Susan as resplendent as a chignon, three parts horsehair, and a bonnet all scarlet flowers and black ribbon, and a "costume" flounced to her waist, could make her. Madge had opened the door for them when they went out, and given the baby a kiss at parting; and Susan told her that she should go and see it at times, forgetting, in baby's presence, that she was asking a girl from the parish to go and visit her mother, who had paid rates and taxes in her time. Millicent had looked after them from the drawing-room window, with eyes that showed, for once, some faint interest in what they gazed on: and she had thought how like a lady the little governess looked, although her people had been in trade.

Madge had promised to get tea ready for them by the time they came back. The doctor was going out to dinner in the evening, so the rest of the household had dined early, and Mrs. Williams had taken the children with her to see her husband's mother, who lived at Notting Hill. These were always visits of some state and dignity. They had the brougham, which was not often at Mrs. Williams's command, and the children wore their best clothes, and expected to stay to tea, and have seed-cake and thin bread-and-butter. Mrs. Williams was not very fond of her husband's mother,—daughters-in-law seldom are; but the old lady had six hundred a-year at her own disposal, and was capricious and arbitrary, and had five children besides Mr. Williams, some living much nearer Notting Hill than he did, and therefore it was of consequence that she should be reminded of his existence at times.

Polly and Susan got out at the Hackney Station, crossed the churchyard, where Polly looked up admiringly at the old tower that remains of the former church, and then, pushing quickly on, found themselves soon in East Street, Homerton. There were large houses and small ones in this street,—some that had seen better days, when their occupants were thriving tradesmen, going to and from their places of business, or those who had given up trade altogether, and come a little way from the stir of the City, where they had made their money, to settle down where green fields were near, without being too far away from old companionship.

It had been a well-to-do place in its time. The large houses had still a solid air of comfort and respectability about them, but their

occupants were of a very different class to what they had once been. Some were let out in apartments; others were entirely empty, and the windows were broken and draped with cobwebs; while yet others were employed as business premises, and dyeing or boot-making was carried on in them.

The smaller houses had suffered less by the decadence of the neighborhood. They were, perhaps, as well let as they had ever been, and the row to which Susan pointed with some pride as the place "where mother lives," was not devoid of a certain homely, unpretending comfort. They were habitations of about six rooms each, with a very tiny forecourt, from which a flight of steps led into a broad area, whence the lower rooms opened. The areas were so broad, and the steps so easy of descent, that Polly had no feeling that baby's home would be, in a manner, under the level of the street as she followed Susan.

"Mother has the front room, miss; and she likes its being on the ground floor,"—there was no thought with Susan of its being *under* ground—"because she can go in and out as she likes without mixin' with the neighbors. It's pleasanter to a person who's had a house of her own."

A door, of which the upper part was of glass, as well as a window, looked on the area, so that Mrs. Smith's apartment was amply lighted, although to secure her privacy, there were muslin blinds before the glass. The apartment was fairly tidy. Polly knew enough of the class she was visiting not to expect too much. There was a chest of drawers, with a tea-tray and some books on it,—a decent bed, with a patchwork quilt, in the corner,—four Windsor chairs, two of them with arms and cushioned seats,—a round table in the center, and an oblong one, which served as a sideboard, against the wall. The look-out was not unpleasant, for, the floor of the room being only four feet below the ground, its occupants were enabled to see something of the passers-by; and in summer, no doubt, the flower-bed, which now had dried sticks in it, would contain living plants; and there were three geraniums and a bird in the window. People who liked pets and flowers would not be unkind to children, thought Polly.

Mrs. Smith was a tidy-looking woman, and Susan's sister was a paler, sharper-featured edition of Susan herself, *minus* the chignon and the flounces. It is only amongst our servants that we must look for a successful caricature of our fashions. They were both at work, and, unless to lean back in her chair now and then, as if exhausted, Susan's sister continued at work the whole time the visitors were there. The mother's fingers slackened now and then when she was making the arrangements about "baby."

They were not very difficult to make. For five shillings a-week, Mrs. Smith was ready to undertake the child, "and do her duty by it," she said, emphatically. "Fresh milk from the cow—I shall go an' see it milked myself, it's only round the corner—and as much fresh air in the Park as Jane is able to give it. I wanted a nurse-child on her account mostly, to get her out in the Park, and let her feel she's not doin' nothin' ayther. Those that have got their livin' to get can't afford to go out just for going out's sake."

Polly was very fairly satisfied with Mrs. Smith, and listened with

exemplary patience to her account of the fellow-lodgers, with whom she had very little to do, and the time when she had a house of her own. Polly was a clever talker in her way, but she was quite as good a listener, and won Mrs. Smith's heart by the sympathy of her silence, more than she could have done by any amount of words. Mrs. Smith had one grievance to complain of—her area was not her own. Having the front room—she was as careful not to call it kitchen as Susan was not to speak of its being under ground—she considered the area her property; but the children of the first floor and of the people of the house, would come and sit upon her steps and make incursions into the area, even peep in at the windows, and carry on their games, till one couldn't hear one's self speak for them.

"It's downright imperence," said Susan, who always took matters with a high hand, having acquired the habit through teaching successive "missuses" their place. "I shouldn't stand it, mother; I'd leave first."

Susan was always leaving through something she couldn't stand; but perhaps her mother was of opinion that "situations" are more easily found than comfortable lodgings, for she made answer,—

"The place suits me in many things, and the people of the house are respectable, which is a great deal to those that have had a house of their own; but to have them children tearin' up and down the steps, an' playin' with their bits of chaney, makin' believe to keep shops on them, is more nor should be. The Browns ain't so bad—it's Mrs. Brown that owns the house, miss—but them Tozers are that aggravatin', that I sometimes feel as if I must lay hands on them—a thing I never did to any one's children but my own; but I think that Jack Tozer will make me, some day."

"There he is, mother; I can hear him a-blowin' of his trumpet," said Jane. "He does that reg'lar, miss," she added, turning to Polly, "every time he comes home from the infant school."

"Out of mere imperence," said Mrs. Smith. "It's in the family. I haven't no opinion of his mother."

Jack Tozer's trumpet was heard in one loud prolonged note of triumph—no doubt poured forth in exultation at its owner's release from school. There was a hubbub of voices, shrill and clear; other children than Master Tozer had evidently left school.

"There'll be no peace for them the next hour," said Mrs. Smith; "not till their tea-time; an' as like as not they won't go in to that, but sit on the step with their bread-an'-treacle, a-chatterin' like so many monkeys. An' if one speaks to them, one only gets sarce; an' as to that Jack, though he's only four years old, for imperence I think he's the worst of the lot."

Polly went to the window and looked out. Jack Tozer was on the steps, with his trumpet in his mouth, as sturdy an infant as ever lifted up a shrill voice in the chorus of a hymn. He was large and rosy, and solidly built, and was puffing away at his trumpet with indomitable determination. Behind Jack were at least half-a-dozen youngsters, of ages varying from two to ten; and Polly, who was peeping behind the muslin blind, noticed that their eyes were furtively turned toward the window, as if they thought a foe might be looking at them. Then there was a little whispering, and gig-

gling, and scuffling, and cries of "You daren't!" and "You daren't!" as if provocative of some deed of enterprise; and then a ball was flung into the area, and the assembled youngsters stood at the top, waiting to see which of their number would venture to fetch the prey from the lion's mouth.

"Now that's another bit o' their imperence," said Mrs. Smith, looking out of the other window, but keeping behind the blind, as Polly was doing, so that she might reconnoiter the enemy unobserved. "They know whatever I find in my area I keep, an' they've flung that ball down o' purpose to see if I'll come out for it; then, if I take it in, they'll be knockin' a dozen times a day, with, 'Please, Mrs. Smith, you've got Mary Brown's ball.' Oh, they're a nice lot, they are! Now they're a darin' of one another to come out and fetch it: they never will be content, they won't, till one or other of 'em's had a good spankin'. There, it's just as I said; they've set that little Jack Tozer on to fetch it, an' he's a comin' down as bold as brass. Ugh, you little villain, don't let me catch you in my area!"

Jack's foot was on the second step, when Mrs. Smith opened her door and called out to him as above. Jack stared at her, but did not flinch. His comrades drew back, and there was a giggle and a cry of "Jack daren't get it now. Jack, run, run! or she'll have you!"

Jack stood his ground manfully. Polly's heart warmed to him. He looked bolder and bonnier than ever. She felt a longing to kiss him or give him a penny; but either would have been an affront to Mrs. Smith. There lay the ball in the area, and Mrs. Smith's angry eyes rested on it. "She'll have it, Jack! She'll have it! You daren't get it; now then!" And Jack, feeling that the eyes of his friends were on him, and inspired, may be, by the valorous sounds he had lately been drawing from his tin trumpet, rushed boldly forward—too boldly, alas! for prudence—and, falling headlong, hit his head with such force against the lowest step, that he lay stunned and inanimate, to all appearance never likely to blow tin trumpets any more.

There was a general howl of horror from the children, not wholly caused by pity of Jack, but springing from a dim dread that if Jack was killed, as seemed likely, those last in his company would be called to account for his untimely end. Shrieks from Susan and her mother. Jane always took matters more quietly—her illness had subdued her; besides, she had not witnessed Jack's fall, being by the fire with the baby in her lap. Polly Brooke opened the glass-door, and soon had Jack on hers, and saw, with a little fear, a great bruise and a cut, both unpleasantly near the temple.

Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Tozer were on the spot as if by magic, so were two or three other mothers from the neighboring houses. The area and the steps were full, so was the forecourt. There was a buzz of questions, cries, reproaches, lamentations—three, at least, of the children thinking it their duty to set up each a steady roar for their playfellow. But Jack lay quietly in Polly's arms, even when she had dashed water on his forehead, and poured a teaspoonful of brandy down his throat; so at last, looking up to his mother, she

said,—"He's stunned by the fall, and it will take him a little time to get over it. It might be as well to send for the doctor."

CHAPTER VI.

JACK TOZER'S DOCTOR.

"THE doctor" was in his little surgery, looking up and looking down the quiet street of small genteel villas, each with its tiny strip of garden-ground in front. There was very little stir at any time in this street, and the only carriages would be that of some medical man—not "the doctor" of whom I am speaking—on his way to a patient, or perhaps an equipage bearing aristocrats from other neighborhoods to look upon the People's Park, that was the pride of this one. From his upper windows "the doctor" could catch a glimpse of the trees of Victoria Park. His house was not ten minutes' distance from it, and the street in which he lived, and several other adjacent ones, had sprung up within the last few years. They were neat little houses, occupied mostly by clerks in the City, and in summer, with the sunlight resting on the white pavement, the little gardens, and the geraniums in the windows, and with glimpses here and there of the Park in the background, they were pleasant-looking enough—much pleasanter to look at than Wurtemburg Street, with its grim, tall house-fronts, and the long line of its dismal areas, on whose railed-in steps even Jack Tozer would not have ventured to blow his trumpet.

But patients were more plentiful at Wurtemburg Street than they were at Lorne Road. The doctor, now waiting in the corner house there, had put his brass-plate on the door six months back, tempted thereto by the lowness of the rent and the "rapidly-improving neighborhood," as the house-agent designated it. It was his first settled habitation. He had been surgeon on board an East Indiaman till now, but at twenty-eight he had thought it time to attempt to establish a permanent practice and a settled home; and so had taken the corner house in Lorne Road, and sat down to wait for patients.

He was pleasant-looking—a better type of his profession, every way, than Mr. Williams. A bronzed face, bright eyes, a genial expression, and a well-knit figure, just above the middle height. His few patients liked him; but they *were* so few, and, unhappily, of a class that did not pay so well as did even Mr. Williams's. The clerks who lived in the pretty new houses and villas round him had not very large salaries, and there were very few dwellers in the neighborhood possessed of any but moderate means. The neighborhood might be improving in numbers, but it was not in money; and Gordon Tynsdell had begun, by this time, to ask himself if he had not made a mistake in settling there.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon; he had had nothing to do for the last four hours but eat his dinner and read the newspaper. He dined early, because his servant told him it was more convenient to her that he should do so. She was an elderly person, who had officiated as char-woman while he was moving into his new residence.

When he was settled in it, she intimated that he had better keep her. "She could do for him better than a young woman, and nobody's tongues would be set going. She would do without a boy for a time, though, of course, any doctor who had an eye to business, would keep one. And he would find her very careful and managing, and a person who knew how to do her work as well as need be, if not interfered with."

Having engaged her master on these terms, Mrs. Sims had matters pretty well her own way. She gave him cold dinners and waxy potatoes five days out of the seven, and did her work after such fashion as pleased her best; so that the matrons of Lorne Road said the sooner Mr. Tynsdell had a wife to look after things, the better it would be; and Mr. Tynsdell himself regretted the life he had known on board ship a little, and the table he had sat down to there a great deal.

There came a ring, short, sharp, and peremptory, and, pushing by Mrs. Sims, in came Susan Smith, flushed, tearful, disheveled, with a terrible story of a child who had fallen down a flight of steps and smashed his head, and of the shock to her own nerves caused by the event, and one of a similar character that had taken place in the morning; winding up with the assurance—her hand on her side, and her words coming out in gasps—that two such "turns" in one day were too much for any one.

Gordon Tynsdell put up a few remedies, asking Susan the while where his patient was; then he went out, outstepping her with his long stride, so that he was in the house before she had reached the corner of the street. The room was full of women—never had there been such an invasion of Mrs. Smith's domestic privacy—while the children stood, a sympathizing crowd, outside. Every now and then one of them would run down the steps, and peer, standing on tip-toe, in at the window, and, coming back, give a report which thrilled the listeners with horror; and then they all would gather in the forecourt, and try and judge of the state of matters for themselves.

Jack had opened his eyes, and murmured something faintly, which had been received with acclamations, before Mr. Tynsdell made his appearance. Polly herself was becoming reassured about Jack's safety, and informed Mr. Tynsdell that she did not think there was so much amiss after all. The doctor looked at his patient, and was of the same opinion; and then he looked at Polly, and thought what a pretty girl she was, and wondered how she had come there.

"If one-half of you would go out," he said, addressing the crowd of sympathizers, "and leave me with the child, he might have a chance. Which is his mother?"

Jack's mother presented herself, and, Mrs. Smith intimating that the room was hers, and that therefore she had a right to remain in it, Mrs. Brown and the remainder of Jack's friends left, and then Mr. Tynsdell asked Polly if she could hold the child while he examined him more fully.

"You have more nerve than most young ladies," he said, when he had not only examined Jack, but doctored his hurts, Polly holding him firmly in her arms, while his mother prevented his kicking.

"The little fellow will do now if he is kept quiet, and I'll look in to-morrow morning and see him."

Jack was not likely to prove a profitable patient; but Mr. Tynsdell felt as if he should not mind that very much if he were to see something more of the bright-eyed young lady, who was now drawing on her gloves in a business-like way, and evidently making preparations for her departure.

"Good-by, Jack," she said, and kissed him. "If you're a good boy, and mind the doctor, I'll bring you a ball the next time I come this way. But mind, no more standing on the steps, or you may break your head so that there will be no mending it."

She gave one kiss to the baby, which Susan followed with half-a-dozen; then, with a good-day and a bow to Gordon Tynsdell, she went out of the glass-door, up the area steps, and into the fore-court. All the children had gone now; their respective mothers had carried them off, and they were now consoling themselves with bread-and-treacle for the end that had been put to their amusements.

"I like that doctor," said Polly to herself, as she and Susan made their way toward the North London Station. "He's a sensible man, and understands his business. If anything ails baby, I shall tell Miss Pembury I don't think she can do better than employ him."

CHAPTER VII.

A MARRYING MAN.

When Polly Brooke came to the door of the house in Wurtemburg Street, she saw, standing on the step, and looking around him with the appearance of honoring everything he looked at by simply letting his eyes rest upon it, a gentleman, whose presence was always distasteful to her, and at this particular moment more distasteful than ever. She was full of the little excitement of her journey, and she wanted to tell Miss Pembury what had taken place, and to let her know the full particulars of the arrangements that had been made with Mrs. Smith. She meant also to tell her of Jack's mishap, and bespeak her interest in the doctor who had been called in.

"He'll never be paid for Jack; but Miss Pembury can pay him for baby—and I dare say he hasn't too many patients. A new doctor in a new neighborhood, or in the outskirts of one that is dying out, isn't likely to be making his fortune," thought Polly, who had a sympathy for all strugglers. "I'll tell her of him. She doesn't seem so unapproachable as she was—baby has had a wonderful effect; and there's Mr. Tomlyn; what does the man mean by staring up and down the street as if it all belonged to him? Well, he can't come in, that's one comfort, as Mrs. Williams isn't at home."

But Mr. Tomlyn would come in, even though he heard Mrs. Williams was out, and not likely to be in for some hours. He followed Polly into the dining-room; and as Madge lit the gas, Polly saw an expression in his face as if he had come to Wurtemburg Street for some special purpose, and did not mean to leave till he

had fulfilled it. Some instinct told her this. Polly was not at all a "missish" young lady—not the least given to suppose that every man she met was in love with her, and dying to make a proposal; but still a girl has some intuitive instinct in such matters, let her think as little of marriage as she may; and if Polly had always disliked Mr. Tomlyn, she felt that she hated him now.

And yet he was a man whom a great many young ladies, especially in the position of Polly, could have found it in their hearts to have done anything but hate. He was not bad looking—for a man; his features were of no particular order, but there was nothing to find fault with in them. His mouth, which was the worst part of his face, inasmuch as it was too clearly an index of his character, was concealed by a mustache and beard of a pale sandy color. His hair was of the same hue, his eyes a light steely blue. He was about the middle height, with a very slight tendency to *embonpoint*. He was only thirty-five now, but this tendency might increase unpleasantly in later years. He was always well and very carefully dressed, but with a habit of breaking out into diamond studs and rings on the slightest provocation; and he was a "City man," getting his living in one of those many mysterious ways that are so puzzling to feminine brains, but getting it very comfortably indeed.

Mr. Henry Tomlyn for the last five years had been thinking of marriage. Indeed, he said of himself, he was "a marrying man"—said it with a little pride, and a serene sense of self satisfaction at his own ability to marry, and his benevolence toward women in general by raising one of their number to be his wife. He had an idea that the end and aim of every woman's life was marriage; that the advantages of the connection were so entirely on their side that the least they could give in return was the most complete subservience to a husband's wishes, and the readiest obedience. He meant, when he married, to take a good house in the near suburbs of London, and to keep his wife always handsomely dressed. By-and-by, when he was a richer man—and he believed, and was right in the belief, that he was one of those men with whom riches are sure to increase—he would take "a place" a little way in the country—he would keep a sufficient establishment, and allow his wife a liberal sum for housekeeping; but such sum should be spent as he thought best; and he would have entire control over every person and thing in his household.

He had a mercantile way of looking at everything. He should give a great deal when he married, and therefore he would have a right to expect a great deal back. It was the same with his acquaintances—the intimacies he called "friendships." If he gave a good dinner, he expected as good a one in return; if anybody gave him worse wine than he gave them, he considered himself defrauded; and the spirit of barter—of a just and proper *quid pro quo*—was as powerful in his motives for marrying as in his hospitalities.

He did not care for money—he could afford to do without it; and he did not care for family. A wife better born or better connected than himself might be "high" in her ideas, and her people might be "high" too; he did not want his future relations to look down upon him. But he did want a fair share of beauty. In choosing a wife, as in buying a horse, he had a right to expect good looks as

well as good qualities. And he wanted pleasant, lady-like ways, and a nice temper, and an agreeable companion—not an intellectual one. He was a little afraid of clever women; of the two, he would have preferred a fool; having an idea—a very general, and a very erroneous one—that fools are easy people to manage.

Polly Brooke had seemed to meet all his requirements, only he was a little afraid that she was over-clever; he had said as much to Mrs. Williams, who had been his friend and confidante. It was very good of her, for Polly would be a terrible loss when she went away. "But she will be sure to go, sooner or later," said the poor lady to herself: "and it will be better that she should go so as to be a nice connection for the children, and perhaps, of use to them by-and-by. Besides, it will be such a good thing for herself," thought Mrs. Williams, to whom, as to Mr. Tomlyn, it seemed as if there was nothing left in this world for a woman if she did not succeed in becoming a wife.

"I don't think she is too clever," said Mrs. Williams, when this fear of Mr. Tomlyn's had been communicated to her. "It's the having to get her own living and think for herself gives her that way. It will all wear off when she has somebody else to think for her."

"Because I shouldn't care to marry a woman who thought she had brains enough for the two of us," said Mr. Tomlyn. "The head-piece of the family ought to be on the gentleman's shoulders, not the lady's."

Mr. Tomlyn took his seat in the dining-room, and put his hat on the table. It was a new one, and its glossiness shone in the gas-light. He was more carefully dressed than ever, and had a diamond ring, which he only wore on grand occasions, on his little finger. He seemed perfectly at home, and his self-possession and complacency were more irritating to Polly than ever.

"Don't run away, Miss Brooke," he said. "I may as well be frank, and say that I *didn't* expect to find Mrs. Williams at home, and I did expect to find you. The last time I was here I heard that Williams was going out to dinner, and Mrs. Williams was to have the carriage, and take the children to Notting Hill; so I thought I should find the coast clear; but I didn't expect to find you out. However, you've come back in good time, so there's no harm done; but if you hadn't, I should have called again, for I had something rather particular to say, and I should have called again to say it. Yes, I had made up my mind *to* say it, and I should have called again."

"If you'll excuse my hearing it just now," said Polly, who had, indeed, taken off her hat, but held it only on her arm, "I should be glad. Mrs. Williams asked me to see that Miss Pembury had her tea in good time."

"Miss Pembury can wait," said Mr. Tomlyn, a little testily. "Perhaps you will find, when you have heard what I have to say, Miss Brooke, that you need not think so very much of Miss Pembury."

Polly seated herself. She felt sure now she knew what he was driving at, but he should have no help from her. Let him say

what he had to say, and hear his answer. Perhaps it would surprise him.

"I am all attention, Mr. Tomlyn," she said, gravely laying her hat on the table, and folding her hands, with a certain demureness, in her lap.

Mr. Tomlyn drew his chair a little closer to hers,—close enough for him to put his arm on the back of the seat she occupied; ready, if things went well—as, of course, they would go well—to put it round her waist. He did not want much help, being prepared for a little coyness. All girls were shy, and pretended to be taken by surprise at such times,—most of all a girl would appear to be so to whom such an offer as he was about to make would give such a great elevation. Polly's eyes were downcast; she felt that if she looked him in the face she would laugh outright; otherwise he might have seen something in them which would not have boded well for the success of his suit; but he thought her pretty, dimpling mouth had never looked so pretty and so tempting as it did now; and he went on, more than ever satisfied with the wisdom of the course he was adopting.

"I think you must have known why I've come here so often, Miss Brooke; and I don't think my visits have been altogether unwelcome to you."

"I hope I should never have forgotten myself so much as to let any friend of Mr. and Mrs. Williams see that I thought them unwelcome," said Polly, looking every bit the "governess."

"Oh, as to that, Williams is a good fellow in his way, and Mrs. Williams is very well in hers; but you would never have seen me at Wurtemburg Street so often as you have done if it had not been for another attraction. Miss Brooke, I came to see you. I want a wife: every man ought to be settled at my age; and nothing would give me more pleasure than to be allowed to hope—that—that—you would do me the honor of—of—"

"Accepting the situation," thought Polly, but she said not a word. Sometimes ladies help gentlemen a little in such circumstances. Polly was resolved to give no help at all.

"It's not for me to boast. I don't wish to boast," said Mr. Tomlyn, finding himself unable to finish his sentence, and so beginning another; but his every look, while he spoke, was a boast,—the man was so thoroughly satisfied with himself, so full of the honor and graciousness he was bestowing upon Polly, that she wanted no words to tell her of his feelings; "but I think, in a pecuniary point of view, you would be no loser, Miss Brooke. I should make settlements, as every man in business should make settlements—not that mine is a speculative one, still it is always right to be cautious; and I should take a moderate house somewhere in the suburbs, from a hundred to a hundred and fifty,—it never does to look at ten or twenty pounds, more or less, in the way of house-rent; and in the way of dress for yourself, I should give you—well, say sixty pounds a-year."

Mr. Tomlyn looked at Polly as he thought all these glories would be too much for her. Polly still kept her eyes bent modestly on her hands, and said simply,—

"Sixty! I've only sixteen now for everything!"

"Yes; but I should like my wife to be well-dressed when she sits at the head of my table," said Mr. Tomlyn, loftily. "I daresay it will be a hundred by-and-by. I shouldn't mind beginning with the hundred at once," he said, magnanimously.

But Polly looked so pretty, and her mouth was dimpling, as if ready to break out into smiles of thankfulness at his generosity.

"The silks and satins one might buy with a hundred a year!" said Polly, lifting her eyes, not to him, but to the ceiling, as if in a perfect fervor of gratitude, so Mr. Tomlyn thought. He lowered his arm from the back of her chair to her waist, and was about to kiss the mouth that seemed to grow sweeter and redder every moment he looked at it, when Polly drew herself from him, and sprang to her feet, looking him fully in the face at last. "You haven't bought me yet, Mr. Tomlyn; and I'm not sure that you'll buy me at all."

Mr. Tomlyn looked surprised and a little confused; then he said,—

"I don't quite understand you, Miss Brooke. I have paid you a compliment—the highest, it is generally supposed, that a gentleman can pay a lady—and you seem almost to resent my doing so."

"It isn't the compliment I mind so much," said Polly, "but the way of putting it. You have told me all you would give me, Mr. Tomlyn, just as if you were offering wages to a housekeeper. I don't say the wages are bad ones, but I've no mind for the situation."

"Ain't you speaking rather hastily, Miss Brooke? I don't think you have quite given yourself time to reflect; besides, young ladies are apt to say 'No' the first time of asking," he added, with a faint attempt at jocularity.

"I shouldn't," said Polly, "if I meant yes; but I don't mean it, Mr. Tomlyn."

"I—I—don't think you have given the matter the consideration that I may say it deserves," said Tomlyn. "There are certain advantages in the offer which I have made you; and you will excuse my saying so, Miss Brooke, but a young lady, situated as you are, is not likely to meet with such an offer twice."

"That's very likely," said Polly; "and I really feel very much obliged for the honor you have done me; but still, I can't accept it. I don't think you and I should get on together very well."

"Is there anything you object to in me?" asked Mr. Tomlyn, with a little eagerness.

But he could not yet believe himself refused. Perhaps the young lady was only pretending a coyness, in order to raise her value in his eyes. He stood up before Polly, and drew himself up to his full height, not a very great one, as if challenging her to look his fair proportions over and find a single fault. Polly did look at him leisurely and calmly, and said,—

"Nothing in particular."

"Then is there anybody else you prefer to me? I thought—I flattered myself there was no prior attachment."

Mrs. Williams, whom he had sounded in the matter, assured him that to the best of her belief there was none. Polly never seemed to have any letters but from her step-mother in the country, and she never went out, or seemed to wish to go out, unaccompanied by the

children. There could be no other attachment, she was sure. "Because I should like to feel that the coast was clear," said Mr. Tomlyn, feeling that, if the coast was clear, he should only have to walk over the course. "I shouldn't wish, of course," he now continued, to Polly, "to behave in a dishonorable manner to any one; still, a young lady should think of herself, and I think the proposal I have made you deserves a little consideration. Early attachments are not always prudent ones."

"I never formed an attachment, in the way you mean, in my life," said Polly. "I don't much think I ever shall. I've always had too much to do to think of falling in love."

"Then if there is nobody else in the way, I really don't see why you should object to me," said Mr. Tomlyn.

"It's not merely that there's nobody else in the way, but that I've no particular liking for you," said Polly.

"You're very plain-spoken, Miss Brooke," said Mr. Tomlyn, with a little irritation; "and I don't think you've sufficiently considered all the advantages you might gain by accepting the proposal I have made you. Governessing can't be so very nice, and any day you may be thrown out of a situation."

"Then I should have to look for another," said Polly; "but the situation of your housekeeper would never suit me at all, Mr. Tomlyn. It would be a permanent one, remember: no chance of a change. I've got to get my living, and governessing has its disagreeables; but I think the hardest way of getting a living must be to marry for one. I'm very much flattered by the compliment you've paid me, but, if you'll excuse me, I'm sure Miss Pembury must want her tea. We dined early to day."

"I don't wish to detain you, Miss Brooke," was the answer, given with a little sullenness. "Perhaps you may think this over. It's worth thinking over. Most people would say so. It's not every day a young lady has such a chance of bettering her condition; and if you should change your mind—"

"I'll certainly let you know, Mr. Tomlyn; but I don't think I shall. Good evening."

CHAPTER VIII.

MILLICENT PEMBURY'S STORY.

"So I've had an offer," said Polly to herself, when in her bedroom. "A real offer, after all! I wonder if I look an inch taller. I don't suppose I shall ever have another. Such things don't come often in one's way. To think of it! I might have had a husband of my own! Sixty pounds—no, a hundred—for one's fallals. Oh, dear, how nice to be able to walk down Regent Street without breaking one's heart with envy of the fine things one sees and can't possess. I daresay I should have had a carriage after a bit. Mr. Tomlyn is sure to make money very fast. Just think of all that might have been, and then think of Miss Pembury's tea."

Polly put her hat and jacket very carefully away. They were her best; and she had not sixty pounds to spend. Then, smoothing her hair, as well as hair which was always trying to ripple and

curl would be smoothed, she went downstairs, and desired Madge to take the tea into the drawing-room. "And I suppose Susan has told you," she said, "that baby seemed very comfortable in her new quarters?"

"Yes,"—Madge's face brightened up a little,—"I'm glad it's not in the workhus."

"No; thanks to Miss Pembury, we can do better for it than that, and I daresay Mrs. Williams will let you go and see it after a while; and, as Mrs. Smith won't have time for all the little things it wants, I've brought some pinafores home with me to do. Susan is going to help. Would you like to make one?"

"Yes; and I can work rare and neat when I choose," said Madge, with increasing interest in her tones.

"And I'm sure you'll choose to do it for baby. Now let us have some tea, that's a good girl. I'm quite tired."

"Saying 'No' *is* tiring," said Polly to herself, as she went up the kitchen stairs. "What a difference the baby has made to that girl! I wish I'd taken a little notice of her sooner. I don't know that it would have been of much use though, if the baby hadn't come. But there's the making of a human being in her, after all. Baby has proved that clearly."

Millicent Pembury laid down her novel, and turned toward the door with unusual interest. Polly thought how well such interest became her. It heightened her color, and made her eyes look their brightest. Polly liked pretty things, and Millicent, with her fair hands, glistening with rings, on her lap, her rich silken dress flowing round, looked more than "pretty." "I daresay Miss Pembury would be very much amused if she were to know that I have had my first offer,—my very first. I wonder how many have fallen to her share?" thought Polly, as she looked at her.

"Baby seems to be in very good hands," she said, as she seated herself at a little distance from Miss Pembury; and she gave her a description of the place, winding up with a little passing praise of the young doctor.

"I should have thought a more airy place would have been better," said Miss Pembury.

"So it would; and it would have been better if we could have had the child with people better able to carry it out of doors. But you may be able to find a more suitable home when you return to the country. Meanwhile, I think Susan's mother will do very well; and, oh! Miss Pembury, you cannot think how thankful I feel that the poor little creature is not to go to the workhouse, Only to think of its growing up another Madge!"

"As far as I see," said Miss Pembury, with a faint smile, "Madge isn't so much worse than Susan. It's true I haven't taken a great deal of notice of either of them."

"Oh, they both come under my eyes much more than they do under yours. Susan is full of faults—a very fair type of the greatest plague of life; but at least she is a human being. If she scolds a child one minute, she'll kiss it the next. Once, when my head ached, she hurried over her work to sit in the school-room and amuse the children for me; while as to Madge, till this baby came into the home, I never knew her manifest the slightest interest in

any living creature. She didn't care even for the cat! Now, I always consider that a girl who doesn't care for dumb animals is something very much below an animal herself."

Madge came in now with the tea-tray. She had been a long time preparing it; but the bread-and-butter was cut with great care, and the tray set accurately for once. Polly took her place at the tea-table, and over the meal the girls got better acquainted with each other than they had yet been. For once, Milly seemed drawn out of herself. The baby had done it in the first instance, and now Polly's fresh *naïveté* and cheerful sunny temper seemed to give a new light and warmth to their intercourse. When Polly left the room, which she did as soon as the meal was over,—it had certainly not been a short one,—instead of taking up her book again, she found herself thinking of "the governess," and wondering how it was that, with so little to make her life bright, she could yet bring so much brightness with her. Milly had never thought of Polly at all before.

A girl whose people had been in trade, who washed and dressed as well as taught the children she had charge of, was something as much beneath her notice as was either of the servants of the house. It was not, perhaps, that Millicent Pembury was proud, but she was shut up in her own world—bound in by her caste. It had never seemed as if she could have anything in common with these girls till the baby had come to the house, and appealed to them all alike.

"Then, too, Milicent had had her troubles, at which I have hinted, and been, perhaps, selfishly engrossed by them. There had been shame as well as sorrow to her—the shame of having loved unworthily; the feeling that she ought not to go on loving, and the impossibility of tearing the love from her heart. For she was a girl who had grown up in the belief that love to a woman meant everything; that a happy, successful love was the one indispensable condition of a woman's life, unless that life was to be regarded in the light of an utter failure.

Aunt Danvers, who had brought her up from the time she was ten years old, had been the means of her forming such ideas; and yet Aunt Danvers herself would have thought them absurdly romantic, and said that nothing could have been further from her teachings. But not the less, Millicent Pembury had grown up under her aunt's care with the idea that it was for man to crown and complete a woman's life. But where she put love, Mrs. Danvers put marriage; and in a successful marriage, according to Mrs. Danvers's idea of one, love was not at all a necessary ingredient—indeed, a love-match, in the opinion of Millicent's aunt, was about the most absurd and foolish thing possible, and she took great credit to herself for having prevented her niece from making one.

This was how it had happened. This was the story and the sorrow of Millicent Pembury's life.

She had grown up a little queen in her kingdom under Aunt Danvers's regency. The kingdom was not a very large one. The Pembury possessions in land had never brought them in above four thousand a-year, and they had never been people with the gift of saving. But they had always held their own in the county, and

had been well regarded through successive generations. There was not a county family, according to Aunt Danvers—who had been a Miss Pembury before she married the first of her three husbands—better connected or more thought of. But they had died out, having a habit of marrying late in life, and of leaving very few children behind them; so that when little Millicent came to her kingdom, on the death of her father,—her mother had died when she was a baby,—she had scarcely a connection but Aunt Danvers (who came over from Cheltenham, to devote herself, as she said, to her niece) and Sarah Pembury, now Mrs. Williams, who came humbly in the widow's wake as useful companion.

There were very few people in the neighborhood, so Mrs. Danvers said, who could associate with her niece. That part of Hertfordshire had been taken possession of by the Londoners of a certain class, and they had built themselves new houses and bought old ones, till society had become, in the eyes of such as Mrs. Danvers, a tradeocracy, with nothing but its money to recommend it. One after another of the old families had gone away, and their lands and mansions had been bought and "improved" by one rich citizen or another, till, within a circle of several miles around Pembury Hall, there remained but one house with whose inmates Mrs. Danvers deigned to associate.

And the people who lived there—the Gordons—were, at least, free from the taint of money, though it might be there were worse taints than that hanging round them. The father, Horace Gordon, had been dead some years when Mrs. Danvers came to the regency of Pembury Hall, and his life had been such that there was little cause to regret his death even in the very prime of his manhood. He had left his property very much involved, and his widow did her best, during her son's minority, to clear it.

At the Holmes they lived very quietly; saw but little company; the fruit was sold, as it ripened, to a dealer in Covent Garden. There was neither a lady's-maid nor a carriage, though, perhaps, when Mrs. Gordon married, she had thought both indispensable conditions of her existence. But Horace Gordon, the son,—he had his father's name, and it might have been well if that had been all he had inherited from his father,—was sent to Harrow, and then to college, with an allowance almost as ample as that of any Gordon before him.

And there was a miserable woman, slowly dying at Brampton, whom some other women in Mrs. Gordon's place would have scouted and shunned as a very pariah and offscouring of the earth, and have left to starvation or the workhouse, to whom Mr. Gordon's widow still continued the allowance that had been made during his lifetime. She forgave her, for the sin was involuntary, and done in ignorance; but whether she ever forgave the husband who had wronged her, is another matter. Few women, indeed, have so much to forgive at the hands of any man as had the widow of Horace Gordon, and that other woman who had believed herself a wife in his lifetime, only to find, at his death, she was a thousand times worse than widowed.

Mrs. Gordon was a generous woman, and she who had rivaled her so unconsciously could not possibly injure either her or her son.

The sham Scottish marriage, which the poor thing had believed in so firmly, had taken place some years subsequently to Mrs. Gordon's own,—perhaps when her husband was wearying of the wife who continued so long childless,—perhaps because he chose to indulge in a new and dangerous form of wickedness. But be that as it may, Mary Tynsdell had believed herself his wife, and her heart was broken when she discovered his sin and her own dishonor. She was of weaker stuff than Mrs. Gordon, and had believed in the man, and loved him to the last—a thing which the other, who was of different material, had ceased to do for many years.

Mary Tynsdell had a son, of whom we have caught a glimpse, and shall have more to see by-and-by. He was a baby when his father died, and she gave him his father's surname as a baptismal appellation. He was to be Gordon Tynsdell now, not Horace Gordon, as she had once thought with such proud fondness. There was another Horace Gordon now. And after a year or two of slow decay she died, and Mrs. Gordon of the Holmes took charge of her child as well as of her own.

Of Gordon Tynsdell, Millicent Pembury had seen nothing; indeed, it is doubtful if she knew of his existence. Mrs. Danvers knew of it just as she knew of every other piece of family history in the chronicles of her equals. But of Horace Gordon, Millicent had seen a great deal.

Gordon Tynsdell never came to the Holmes. Mrs. Gordon put him to nurse, and then to school; and his home in the holidays was with some relations of his mother, who knew all her miserable story. They were farmers in Somersetshire, and were kind to the boy, both for his mother's sake and his own. He was grateful for their kindness, but never so grateful as he was to Mrs. Gordon. As he grew older, he saw something of her in London, something, too, of his half-brother; and there arose a feeling between the two young men which there is often wanting between whole-brothers. Horace was good-natured—those who said the worst things of him always said that; and he was sorry for Gordon, who had been so badly used. Gordon, too, had helped him out of one or two scrapes he had got into—helped him even with his purse, being much the more provident of the two. There was a frank, warm feeling between the two, honest and brotherly on either side; that is, there had been this feeling, till Horace went wrong altogether, and showed that there was more of his father in him than his name.

But, for Mrs. Gordon, Mary Tynsdell's son had a reverence greater than many a son feels for his mother. She was his ideal of womanhood—perhaps because he had not seen too much of her, and all that he had seen had been too good and lofty and womanly. "There is not one woman in a thousand would have done as she did by my mother," he thought; and perhaps it was for her sake, more than for his own, that he gave so much liking to his brother—for her sake, too, that, when every one spoke ill of Horace, and his name had a bitter sound even in his mother's ears, his half-brother would not wholly give him up.

There was not much in common between Mrs. Danvers and Mrs. Tynsdell, but they were neighbors, widows, and had the same social position; and thus it happened that a certain intimacy arose, and

their two young people saw very much of each other. Mrs. Danvers approved of their doing this. At that time, Horace Gordon promised fair to be a very good match even for the heiress of Pembury Hall. His mother had nursed his estates round successfully, so that when he became of age he was able to hold his own in the county. Millicent and he grew fond of one another—she of him especially; and after a time an engagement was duly entered into, and they were to be married when Millicent was one-and-twenty.

It wanted but a year of that, and Horace came up to London. His mother had had a small house there the last three seasons, but he did not come with her now. He would have a little time as a bachelor first, he said; and from London he would go to one country-house and another, where he had been invited. Then he should come back to the Holmes and await his wedding there.

He loved Millicent Pembury at this time. He had loved her for years,—not so much, perhaps, as she had loved him, for he was of a weak, unstable nature, in which no strong feeling could take root. Still he *had* loved her; and if it had not been for this whim of spending a few months of his unmarried life in London, and the wish to take a yet further flight into the country, things might have been altogether different, and his name have been stainless and honored, instead of being, as it was now, tarnished and dishonored, as was his father's.

He had not been two days in London before he met with a certain Mrs. Towers. She had been a Miss Paull when he first knew her, and he had known her now at intervals that extended over three years. She was his own age—six-and-twenty—perhaps a few months his senior; and there had been between them, if not exactly love-making, still a great deal that looked very like it. Adela Paull was a girl who had nothing to look to but marriage. If she did not marry, there would not be fifty pounds a-year for her at her father's death; for the Paulls were a large family, and the head of the house was not a provident man. She would have liked very well to have married Horace Gordon. The only trade she had ever been brought up to was husband-hunting; there was no way for her of getting a living but by marrying for it. If she did not marry, what was there for her to look forward to? Adela never dared look forward; the prospect would have been too horrible. She did like Horace Gordon. There was much in him that was very likeable; he was handsome, pleasant-mannered, and, as I have said, good-natured—ah! with that facile good-nature which is so often the ruin of a man's life. He was kind-hearted too. If he had been a harder, sterner man altogether, that would never have befallen which did befall him.

But of Adela Paull, Horace had little more thought than he had for other young ladies with whom he found it pleasant to dance, and talk, and spend his idle hours. For his heart was with the young heiress of Pembury Hall; and when he left London, without having made the offer which Adela expected, and which her mother and sisters thought she had a right to expect, and a Mr. Towers made her an offer, which nobody had expected of him at all, she took him at once. She knew little of him but that he was fairly rich, that his manners were tolerable, that he visited in a good

circle, and that there was nothing repulsive or objectionable about him.

Still, at that time, it is very likely that if Riquet with the Tuft, without his wit and with his hump, had proposed, she would have taken him; for, as she would have said to herself, what else was there for her to do? There was nothing she *could* do but marry, and so she married.

Mr. Towers was thirty years her senior, and he had always been one of those men who are never young, even in their youth. He was near, too, bad-tempered, and difficult to live with. Altogether, Adela found that her marriage had not been such a good bargain after all. She was not a happy woman and was likely to be a very miserable one. She had not much power of spending the money which she had sold herself to spend, and she found herself linked to a man with not much care or consideration for any one but himself.

Then she came across Horace Gordon again. It was at the house of one of the friends he was visiting, and she was staying there with her husband. Seeing him now, she felt as if she loved him as she had never thought it possible she could love before. His youth and his pleasantness, and his sunny temper, made such a contrast to her husband. She knew nothing of his engagement; Horace had intended to enjoy these, the last days of his freedom, to the full. Seeing him, there was always the wretched "might have been" occurring to her. For Horace was kinder, gentler, pleasanter than ever; he was so full of pity for her that she should be married to such a cur!

Then he showed his pity, and she told her sorrows, and he began to believe that it was pique at his neglect which had driven her into the arms of this man. He was flattered by this, for Adela Towers was handsomer than ever Adela Paull had been; and she led him on, and was led on herself. One sickens as one writes of the miserable story of shame, and weakness, and sin; but so it was that Adela Towers went wrong a second time. The first time had been that wretched unloving marriage of hers; and Horace proved himself his father's own son, by forgetting honor, truth, every tie that bound him to his mother, and the girl who was waiting to be his wife, by running away with Adela three days after she had returned with her husband to London.

At first his mother thought this blow would kill her. It shocked and wounded her even more than any sin of her husband's had ever done; for she had built so much on her son. He had been her consolation and her strength. He was to make up to her for all that she had suffered in those wretched early years of her marriage. And now her consolation had become her curse; her strength had proved itself most utter weakness; and instead of the sufferings and ignominies of the past years being made up to her, they were to be trebled in their pain and their humiliation.

But she did not die. There are strong women, who are strongest of all in their suffering. After a little time, during which she shut herself up, and would see no one, for very shame, as it seemed, for being the mother of such a son, she went about much in her old way. It had always had a certain quiet gravity about it. She

looked after the household, as she had always done, and saw to her own matters of business. But her son's she would have nothing to do with. She had saved and spared, and toiled, as few women of her class could or would have done, and all for him to spend the fruits of such savings in riot and wickedness! Let him, while he stayed away with the partner of his sin, find an agent to look after his estate. She would trouble herself about it no more. And if he came back to the Holmes alone, she might stay there, but would refuse to see him; and if he brought Adela Towers there, either while she bore that name, or when the law had allowed her to take his own, she would leave the place at once.

But the prodigal did return long before he was looked for. Millicent Pembury fell ill—dangerously ill, and the news of her illness reached his ears. He went to the Holmes, and his mother would not see him. Then he withdrew himself to the village inn, saying he would not stay under his own roof if his doing so involved her shutting herself up in her apartments. But he would not leave the neighborhood till he heard that Millicent was out of danger; then he sought Mrs. Danvers, and implored to be allowed to see her.

He asked it humbly enough; indeed, he was very humble just now. He had not been a week with Adela Towers when he found that he did not love her at all, and that he loved Millicent more than ever. He was not prepared to make the only reparation in his power to the woman who had sinned with him, if her husband divorced her. That would involve the sacrifice of his whole life. He would do anything short of that. Provide for her as liberally as his means allowed; but marry her! Surely, with Millicent Pembury dying for him, that would be too much for him to do.

Mrs. Danvers received him with a certain frigid politeness, admirably adapted to the circumstances. She had been very much annoyed by his escapade—the euphemism is her own—and propriety required that she should seem shocked and horrified; and, whatever propriety required, Mrs. Danvers always did. But her real feeling had been one of annoyance and irritation. Young men would do such things—nobody was more ready to make allowance for the misconduct of young men than Mrs. Danvers; but why should this especial young man have chosen such an inopportune time to misbehave himself?

It was impossible for Millicent to condone his offense just yet. If he had committed it three or four years ago, when he came of age, and there was no engagement between them, a decent time would have elapsed for the scandal to have been forgotten. But now, with the story fresh in every one's mouth, when every one knew, too, of the insult to Millicent by this folly being perpetrated during his very engagement to her, how would it be possible for her to forgive his misdoings? And as to waiting till the scandal had subsided, that would be an affair of years, and no one knew what might happen in the interim. It would be an expensive affair, too: he must provide for that wretched Mrs. Towers; and that would make him so much the poorer a man than when he had offered himself to Millicent. It was clearly not worth Millicent's while to wait till the stir caused by his misdeeds had subsided, when such

waiting would involve the loss of three or four of the best years of her life.

Mrs. Danvers did not put all this in words. She was severe and cold toward Horace, letting him see his sin was one she thought past all forgiveness. He could not see Millicent,—that was out of the question, she told him,—and everything must be at an end between them. But he *did* see Millicent: he waited and waited in the village till she was better, and then, one day, contrived to thrust himself into her presence. At first she would neither speak to him nor suffer him to utter a word in his defense. But she had loved Horace Gordon dearly, and she loved him still; and she found herself listening to his prayers for pardon, and his protestations that in all his madness and his weakness he had loved her alone. She would have forgiven him; she would have overlooked everything, in the belief that his love had always been hers, had it not been for his own mother, whom Mrs. Danvers called to the rescue. *She* told her that a woman would not be worth the name if she could forgive such an offense as Horace had been guilty of, and become his wife; that if, after his sin, he married at all, it must be the wretched partner of his sin. That would possibly complete the ruin of his life, but there was nothing else for him now but ruin.

Millicent acquiesced, and felt that for her, too, life was over; and there came, not a relapse into the fever from which she had just recovered, but something even worse—a long, lingering dying; so it seemed to the poor girl; just because life was no longer worth the living. Then she took a little cold, and it settled on her lungs, and Aunt Danvers feared consumption. The family medical attendant looked grave, and it was thought well that she should go to London and have other advice. "A change must do her good, in any case," said Aunt Danvers; "and she will be safe enough with Sarah Williams."

And so she had come to Wurtemburg Street, and the inherent vitality within her had asserted itself. She was stronger than she had thought for—too strong, as yet, to die; and there was all life—fifty years, it might be of aimless, sunless, joyless life—stretching out wearily before her.

CHAPTER IX.

HORACE GORDON.

Polly had gone upstairs to proceed with some little matters which required her attention, when Susan came to the drawing-room, and, with a slight air of mystery and importance, handed a note to Miss Pembury.

"It was giv' to me, miss, by a gentleman as was passin' just as I had gone to the door, thinkin' I heard a knock; he's waitin', miss, to know if there's an answer. I told him," said Susan, lowering her voice to a still more mysterious whisper, "you was alone, and that I'd give it to you at once."

Susan looked profoundly interested—and she was so. Miss Pembury was a veritable heroine of romance in her eyes. She had made up her mind from the first that her illness arose from some

disappointment in love. Susan was always in love herself; generally with two at a time. There was a standing lover, the young man she kept company with, who waited for her every Sunday by the lamp-post at the corner of the street, and was usually a baker, and retained his situation (in Susan's heart) about a twelvemonth. There was always a policeman or two—generally the one whose beat included the house where Susan officiated *pro tem.*; but, of course, she had to change him when she changed her place. If the policeman on duty happened to be married, or otherwise monopolized, Susan generally consoled herself with the postman. But she preferred policemen, though she never attempted to regale them at her mistress's expense; indeed, at Mrs. Williams's it would not have been easy to do so. She had been looking out for the policeman while waiting at the street door, it being a pure fiction that she had heard a knock.

Miss Pembury looked at the note, which consisted of a few hurried, imploring words, signed "H. G.," in a hand she knew but too well; then she laid it down, and was trying to nerve herself to say there was no answer, but found the words would not come to her lips. She turned very pale, and Susan, full of sympathy, broke in,—

"The gentleman looked dreadful anxious, miss: an' do let me get you some water. I told him you was alone in the drawing-room, an' he said may be you'd see him; so I left him in the hall while I came up; an' can I get you your salts, miss, or a little *salv'latile*, for I think I hear his step on the stairs! I'd never have let him in, miss; but I see he *was* a gentleman, and looked so earnest. An', oh! miss, forgive the liberty, but it's an awful thing to drive a young gentleman like that to desperation."

Susan's warmest sympathies were enlisted in favor of Horace Gordon. She would have pleaded his cause with equal ardor even if he had not slipped a sovereign into her hand along with the note: but still the sovereign heightened the romance and despair of the situation. A gentleman must be very much in love indeed to give so much on the mere hope of seeing his lady. Susan had never felt so elated or important in her life as while she was speaking now to Miss Pembury. She was third person in a story as good as any she had ever read in any of her penny sensationals. Millicent Pembury sat unable to speak or move, the words she should have said choking in her throat; and Horace's step sounded on the stairs, and he was coming—nearer, nearer, nearer. The room seemed going round. Susan's voice sounded like the buzz of an insect. She tried to speak, to stand upright, to compose herself, and it was all in vain. All pride, all dignity, all womanly disdain were sobbed away as her tears fell fast on Horace Gordon's bosom.

Susan knew better than to stay when he entered the room. She closed the door behind her when she withdrew, and gave a great gasp of delight and emotion. Then she went downstairs, and found Madge, slowly and with much painstaking, hemming the pinafore for the baby. Susan felt as if she must speak—must have some outlet for her feelings; they would be too much for her else.

"What a day this has been, to be sure!" she said. But Madge took no notice. One idea at a time seemed as much as her brain

would hold; and she went on with her hemming, quite unmoved by Susan's excitement. "To think of it! Miss Pembury's lover has come! I knew she had one. Now, Madge, if you are a good girl, —and you really have behaved a little more like a Christen to-day,— I'll manage to let you see him."

"Don't care to," said Madge, still putting her stitches in and out with the slow deliberation that always characterized her movements. "Never did care about anybody's young man. One's as good as another, for all I see."

"There's no putting any sense into your head!" cried Susan indignantly.

Then she went to the street-door to look out for the policeman. He would be sure to find time for a few words.

Upstairs, Horace Gordon was using all his eloquence to induce Millicent to forgive him. If he had but known it, she had done that long since. All the magnitude of his sin against God, against society, against herself, was forgotten in her love. For himself, he was miserable—almost as much so as he deserved to be. He was weak and vacillating as one of Mr. Trollope's heroes. For a little time he had thought himself in love with Adela Towers, only to find, now that with him and for him she had gone headlong to her ruin, he had never really cared for her. Now he was urging Millicent to save him, to save herself, by becoming his wife.

And she was listening just as she had listened before, and felt herself again on the verge of yielding, when the door opened, and Polly came in with her work-basket. She had come to ask Millicent if she should spend the remainder of the evening with her. She was about to go away at once, feeling that she was not wanted, when Millicent called to her to stay. It was a desperate yearning to gain time. She would not yield yet. Alone with Horace, she felt as if she must promise everything he asked her—as if all in this world was worth nothing if he asked her to sacrifice it for him. Polly's sunny, good-tempered face recalled her to something of her better self. There was something besides passion and love in the world, after all.

"Just stay, Miss Brooke," she said faintly; "Mr. Gordon is going directly."

Horace understood that she meant him to go; that just then was no time to utter either protestations of love or appeals for pity. Almost unconscious why she was doing so, Millicent kept Polly near her, putting her hand out, as the other took her seat near her, as if to ask for protection. Polly took it; the thin, white fingers were cold and clammy. "There's something wrong," thought the girl. "That young gentleman has something to do with Miss Pembury's cough, and her staying in London for medical advice. He's beautifully dressed, and he's very nice-looking, and where on earth have I seen such a face before?"

It was the likeness to Gordon Tynsdell that struck her, though at first she could not remember of whom it was that Horace Gordon reminded her. But the likeness was only in features—the turn of the head, and the wave, and the color of the hair. When you came to expression, the resemblance was wholly wanting. Gordon Tynsdell looked prompt, resolute, good-tempered—a man with all his

energies and powers ready for instantaneous use; but with Horace Gordon there was a total want of either energy or power. He was the handsomer of the two, there could be no question about that; but there was a weakness, an indecision in the eye and the lip, that Polly's quick eyes detected instantaneously, and which roused her contempt. Polly had little sympathy for weakness in a woman, none whatever when it manifested itself in a man. "They set themselves up for our rulers and guides," said Polly, who was emphatically a girl of our day, and had her own ideas as to the relative position of men and women; "let them show themselves fit for the post they claim—if they can."

Horace Gordon could not go yet. Instead of making a graceful retreat, he preferred staying on—awkwardly. He tried to talk of indifferent subjects, and Millicent could only answer by the faintest yes or no. Polly would not help him at all in making conversation, but sat with Millicent's hand in her own, watching him keenly.

"It will never do for him to marry Miss Pembury," she thought. "He wants a wife to take care of him, and she will always want a husband to take care of her. No, that will never do. But who *is* it that he reminds me of? I know! That young doctor I saw today, only the doctor has much the better face of the two, and I should say is ten times the cleverer and more capable man."

At last Horace Gordon rose to go. It was utterly useless, he felt, his staying there. Millicent would not see him alone. But as he held her hand, which he had withdrawn from Polly's soft, supple grasp, to place in his feverish one, he said, in a questioning tone,—

"I shall see you again soon, or at least hear from you?"

"I—I will write," said Millicent, falteringly.

"And for God's sake let it be soon!" he urged. "If you could but know, if you could but realize, how everything to me depends upon hearing from you!"

Then he went away. Susan, standing at the door listening to the retreating steps of her policeman, let him out, looking at him with a little furtive, sympathizing curiosity. "Poor young man! he hasn't got on so well as he'd have liked. I should say that Miss Pembury's a hard one. Ladies often is. If I was a gentleman, I'd rather have a girl with a little feelin' in her, so long as she was nice-lookin', an' come of decent people, than I would a fine lady, that thought of nothing but herself. And I'm sure he's one that needn't stand airs from nobody. I wouldn't neither, if I was him."

CHAPTER X.

DRAWN CLOSER STILL.

POLLY still kept her seat on the couch by Miss Pembury's side, wondering whether the young lady wished her to go or stay. As to Millicent, she sat for a little time in her usual listless attitude, with her hands in her lap; then presently, as if possessed by some uncontrollable agitation, arose, and began walking hurriedly up and down the room, in a manner wholly different from her usual languid self-possession. Her head was burning, her eyeballs throbbing. She would have given the world to have flung herself on the

ground, and moaned and cried her life away. But tears would not come, and life would not go; and her lover had told her, half-an-hour back, that if he was ruined in this world and the next it would be her doing; and she had promised to save him, and now felt as if she could neither break her word nor keep it.

Presently she stopped, and flung herself by Polly's side. "Miss Brooke, I *must* speak!—I shall die or go mad if I don't. I have no sister, no mother. You are only another girl; but I watched you with that baby to-day, and you seemed to have known trouble, or you would not have been so pitiful. I wonder if you could pity or help me?"

"I'll try," said Polly, putting her arm round her, and drawing the slight figure closer to her. "Only let me know your trouble, Miss Pembury, and we'll see if anything can be done. It may do you some good even to speak of it."

"It's just the keeping it in, to myself, that seems eating away my very life," said Millicent. "Mrs. Williams is a good creature, but I couldn't speak to her of this,—she wouldn't understand; and as to Aunt Danvers—why, when a woman has had three husbands, how is it possible she can ever have cared enough for any one of them to know what love really is? But you—you are another girl, just like myself; and you look as if you could feel and suffer."

"Just tell me," said Polly, in a caressing tone, drawing the other a little closer to her. They *were* only two girls now; there was no question about one being a well-born young lady and an heiress, and the other a poor little governess, of no birth at all worth speaking of. "Just tell me all about it. And let's see what can be done."

Polly had the gift which some few people have of inspiring confidence. People felt drawn to tell her their troubles. She knew more of Mrs. Williams than did her husband. She could go out of her self and enter into another's identity, and understand just where the smart was the keenest, and the hurt the most hard to bear. She knew that what Millicent most wanted, now, was to break through the reserve and silence which had been freezing her soul. If once her troubles could be spoken of, very likely she would not find them one-half so hard to bear.

"Tell me all about it," she said, gently; and then she heard the whole miserable story.

"That is all very terrible," said Polly, when Millicent had finished. "Mr. Gordon has ruined himself for life, and that unhappy creature too."

"Don't speak of her," said Millicent, impatiently. "This would never have been but for her."

"She'll have to suffer enough, anyhow," said Polly; "but I don't yet understand why Mr. Gordon came here."

"He—he—wants me to look it over—to forgive him," said Millicent, faintly.

"Well, I'd forgive him, and tell him to mend his ways."

"Yes; but that is not all. Oh, don't you see how wretched and lost he will be if I cast him off? That woman will think him bound to marry her when her husband has set her free, and he does not, and never did, care for her. It was all infatuation on his

part. He would provide for her, of course; but to make her his wife! Oh, I cannot, I cannot give him up to her!"

Millicent was sobbing violently now, and Polly was fairly puzzled how to console her. That any girl with claims to honor and purity should care for one who had proved himself so weak, false, and unworthy as had Horace Gordon, was more than she could understand. But Miss Pembury did care for him, clearly, and she was certainly a good girl, though a deplorably weak one. "I cannot give him up!" she repeated; "I cannot let him drift away like this! I believe it would save him if I were to marry him, and I have all but promised him to do so. And yet I know that Aunt Danvers will make it all but impossible for me to keep my word."

"I don't think you ought to keep it," said Polly, gravely. "A man who has done what Mr. Gordon has is not fit to be the husband of any one but that wretched woman. You could never respect him—you could never look up to him after this. If his love had been worth a straw, he would never have forgotten himself—forgotten!—sinned! Oh, Miss Pembury, this man isn't fit to be in the same room with you, and yet you can think of being his wife!"

"Because, let him be what he may, I love him as much as I ever did—more, it seems to me, because of his very weakness; and just think what my life will be if I do not give it to him. Aunt Danvers is bent on seeing me married. I shall have to take any one she thinks fit,—somebody that I don't care for in the least. I shall never care in that way for anybody again; wouldn't it be better to do what I can to save Horace, and make the best, even if it is a poor best, of things, after all?"

"It will be a poor best, indeed!" thought Polly. "I don't see why you need marry at all," she said. "And as to saving Mr. Gordon, I don't think, if a man isn't strong enough to stand alone, that he will be much the better for having a woman to lean upon. Are you sure you're strong enough for the task?"

"I don't know—I don't know," moaned Millicent. "Sometimes it seems to me as if I could lay down my life to make Horace happy; and then the thought of what he has done comes upon me like a horror. Oh, if I could only die, and be rid of it all!"

Indeed Millicent Pembury was weary of her life. She shrank from her lover—there was the memory of his sin rising forever before her, so that his very touch at times seemed a contamination; and yet she loved him with all her heart, or rather she had got into such a habit of loving that it seemed impossible to live without it. And she had been brought up in the belief that if a woman did not marry there was nothing else for her. And to marry as her aunt wished her, and to go on to the end of her days the unloving wife of a common-place husband, after all the paradise that Horace's love had opened to her, seemed not to be borne. As she said, if she could only die, and be rid of it all!

"You will be better to-morrow," said Polly, gently. "Don't you think we can talk things over more to the purpose then? It seems to me you are tired of your life before you know all its value. And you have been very ill, and are not yet strong. Let me be your maid to-night, and help you to undress. The sooner you lie down the better."

Millicent let herself be persuaded, and was glad, indeed, to lay her head down on her pillow, and see Polly sitting by her side. She dropped off asleep like a tired child, and then Polly kissed her tenderly. "I am glad she has told me everything. I shall know how to help her now; but not to marry Mr. Horace Gordon, if I can help it."

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. WILLIAMS DOES HER BEST.

Mr. Tomlyn was an aggrieved man, and he carried his grievances to Mrs. Williams. He told her that he had been refused, and that Miss Brooke seemed unable to give any reason whatever for refusing him. "If she had liked anybody else that she had seen first, I could have understood it," he said; "though I think, then, she might have given my proposal a little consideration. Such an offer isn't to be met with every day."

"I should think not, indeed!" said Mrs. Williams. "But girls never know what is best for themselves. Would you like me to speak to her, Mr. Tomlyn?"

"Well, I think there'd be no harm in doing that. I don't think she can have given the matter the consideration it deserves. Of course there are wives in plenty. Young ladies are to be had like blackberries on bushes, the only trouble sometimes is," he added, with a laugh, which, if Polly Brooke had entertained any, the slightest, relenting in his favor, would have dispelled such relenting at once, "to know which to choose. I did give Miss Brooke credit for sense enough to know that. Why, what will a girl like that do if she doesn't get married?" he added, looking fixedly at Mrs. Williams. "Go on governessing to the end of her days, at sixteen pounds a year—She's deuced cheap at the money, I must say; but I suppose it's all you can afford to give—when she might be my wife, with a good house and servants, and by-and-by, a carriage. I'm not given to boast, but I see my way to that, and anything in reason for pin-money. There's nothing I'd deny a woman in the way of dress. I think a man must be a mean fellow if he doesn't like his wife to do him credit."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Williams, with a sigh of almost envy at the glorious possibilities awaiting Polly. *She* had married because there was nothing else for her to do, and what a very poor bargain she had made compared to the one that was offered to Polly. "You're liberality itself," she said. "I can't think how it is, that Polly doesn't see it."

"I may have been too abrupt," said Mr. Tomlyn, modestly, with the air of a Jupiter, who, however convinced of his general infallibility, deigns to own that he may nod once in a while. "Business men don't always measure their words as those may do to whom talking is their only trade, and she may be tetchy, and have taken offense. I didn't think she was tetchy. Still, I don't know that I like her any the worse. I like the woman I marry to have a good opinion of herself; it isn't every woman, you know, I should marry. Perhaps you'll tell Miss Brooke I'm to be judged by my deeds, not

by my words; and there are not many men who would take a girl without a penny and behave so handsomely as I'm ready to do. She's got no father or mother living, I think you told me? That's just as well. If one marries a wife, one doesn't want to marry her family; still, if she had had anybody living belonging to her, they might have put the thing to her in a rational light."

"She has only a step-mother, not very much older than herself, and she's staying at her father's in the country. If she were in town, she might talk to Polly; but I don't think it would do the good that advice would from an older person. I'll see what I can do, Mr. Tomlyn, you may be sure, though she'll be a greater loss to me than you can imagine."

"Oh, as to that, we must make it up one way or another. Williams shall be the family doctor. Physic the little ones when they come. I dare say he'll find me better pay than most of his patients about here. Well, I'll leave it to you to make it all right with Miss Brooke, and I'll call again in a day or two."

When he had gone, Mrs. Williams thought she would try and "make it all right" at once. "She never can mean to refuse him," she thought; "only, perhaps, as he says, he spoke abruptly; and she has rather a high spirit of her own. It would be such a good thing for her, and no doubt Mr. Williams would have them for patients; and, though I should miss her, still there are many ways in which she could make it up to the children—especially, by-and-by, when the girls grow older."

Up the narrow, toilsome stairs of the London house Mrs. Williams went. The last flight was uncarpeted, in accordance with the spirit of economy that ruled through the house. She opened the door of the school-room, and found Polly, as she had expected, alone, the last of her pupils having just been put to bed. The room was of a fair size, but barely furnished, with Windsor chairs, and an old-fashioned mahogany table with folding leaves, that had been picked up second-hand in Gray's Inn Lane. The carpet was wearing into holes; it had been bought second-hand too. The windows were curtainless, and the one gas-light which hung from the center of the room had no glass burner. There were a few colored pictures, from the *Illustrated News*, pinned on the walls, and some book-shelves in the corner, with some battered school-books, and a few still more battered volumes of a lighter kind. Somehow, the room had never looked so bare and so poverty-stricken as it did now to Mrs. Williams. Perhaps it was the contrast between Polly's present and the future that was awaiting her if she only chose to take it.

"To think of her staying here," thought poor Mrs. Williams, "when she might have a villa in the Regent's Park, with a drawing-room in black and gold! She can't mean it—no girl could seriously mean it; and to look at her there mending Johnny's socks!"

Polly sat by the fire, with her work-basket before her, humming a tune, and darning the holes Master Johnny's toes had worn. In spite of her black dress, she was the one bit of brightness in the room as the gas-light fell on her waving hair, her fresh complexion, and the scarlet bows on her head and throat. She looked up cheer-

fully as Mrs. Williams came in, and handed her a chair, not with the air of a dependant, but rather like a lady doing the honors of her own apartment. Mrs. Williams took the chair, and said, a little fretfully, but still kindly,—

"Put down your work, my dear—somehow I don't like seeing you do it. It does seem so out of place under present circumstances. I suppose, though," she added, remembering the constantly recurring dilapidations, "it's only right you *should* do it, while you stay here, or else I don't know where the children's things would be."

"You're not going to send me away I hope?" said Polly, with a smile, that showed she felt tolerably secure in her present situation.

"No, my dear; I don't know what I should do without you. As I say sometimes to Mr. Williams, you are more like a daughter or a younger sister in the house than any one paid. Still, I ought not to think of myself alone. I can't expect you to stay with me always; and when a girl has an offer, and such an offer as you had the other day, why, it is the duty of her friends to tell her she should accept it."

"Oh," said Polly, "I suppose you mean Mr. Tomlyn's? I thought that was settled."

"My dear," cried Mrs. Williams, with a little whimper of surprise, "you talk as if you had offers every day of your life!"

"Do I?" said Polly. "Then I don't mean to do so. Mr. Tomlyn's proposal is the first I ever received, and I daresay I shall never have another. I've never been in the way of love-making; I had always so much else to think of while poor papa was alive. There were the books to keep and the assistants to look after, and see that they were comfortable; and poor Mandie and her babies, there was always one being born or dying, and the little woman wasn't much better than a baby herself; and poor papa always ailing the last few years more or less; so you see, Mrs. Williams, I really had no time for love-making. I think one of the assistants *did* try something of the kind," said Polly, reflectively; "he was young, and ours was his first situation, so I suppose he thought he was bound to make love to his master's daughter; but I told him if he took any nonsense of that kind in his head, he'd be poisoning people,—giving them arsenic instead of salts,—and that I should have to mix the prescriptions up myself, instead of trusting him with them. That snubbing did him good for a time, but he broke out again—I think Mandie encouraged him, she was always a silly little goose; so I told papa he must go, and he went; and as we couldn't get another just as soon as we wanted, papa sat in the shop and received the prescriptions, and heard what people had to say, and I did all the real work in the back parlor."

"You made up the medicines!" said Mrs. Williams, with a little faint horror. All her emotions were faint and feeble. Poor thing! all force and vitality had long since departed from her.

"Yes, I made them up," said Polly, triumphantly. "I didn't poison anybody. Oh, dear! if I'd only been a boy, instead of a girl, I could have kept on the shop, and Mandie, and the babies too. I should have made a good chemist, I know I should. I

liked it, and it's nice, neat, fiddling work—just fit for women's fingers. Why don't they let the women do it?"

"You have such odd notions, Polly," said Mrs. Williams, who, if her weakness had any strength whatever, had it in the conventionalities. "Why, you'll want to be a doctor next!"

"And I'm sure I should make a good one," said Polly. "I only wish I'd the chance."

"But, Polly—the—the indelicacy of it," gasped Mrs. Williams; "the getting out of bed at all hours; the having to huddle on your things anyhow; the hurrying through mud and rain—don't I know what it is with Mr. Williams! And then, fancy being called in to attend a man!"

"Fancy a man being called in to attend me!" said Polly. "I never have been ill since I was quite a little child, but I think if I were—I don't mean any disrespect to Mr. Williams—I should think the doctor worse than the disease. It's horrid, when one thinks of it. Nothing but use could make women endure it. Still, if I were a doctor, or doctress, I should only lay myself out for women and children; but, if I were called out to a male patient on any emergency, I don't see why I shouldn't go—it would be much pleasanter work than nursing him; and as to being called up in the night, why women are subject to that as it is—Mandie seemed always to be rousing her nurses out of their beauty sleep. Poor old incapables! I always used to give them some strong tea when they came, to make them fit for their work. Fit for it! I don't believe they ever were that," said Polly, with a little contemptuous shrug. "It's my firm belief, from what I saw of Mandie's old ladies, that we shall never have good nurses till we've lady doctors to look after them."

"If Mr. Williams heard you, Polly," said Mr. Williams's wife, "I don't know what he would say. But I don't know why we began talking about doctors and nurses when I wanted to speak to you about Mr. Tomlyn. Polly, you can't, you really *can't* be in earnest in refusing him. You'll never have such another chance. I don't know a girl who wouldn't be ready to jump out of her skin with delight in having him. And you know, dear, governessing isn't much,—not unless one has all the accomplishments and has passed the examinations; and, much as I shall miss you, I feel that you could do so much better for yourself if you were to take Mr. Tomlyn."

"I don't like him," said Polly.

"But that will come, my dear. You'll like him well enough in time—unless, indeed, you like somebody else," said Mrs. Williams, glancing with a little suspicion at the girl. She was not quite sure, little as love-making had been in Polly's way, but that one or other of her late father's assistants, or some one else, might have touched her heart.

"No, there's nobody else," said Polly; and Mrs. Williams felt as if she must believe her. "I suppose it sounds funny to you, but, though I'm nearly twenty-two, I never saw anybody I could like—in that way. There's nobody else I care for, but that's no reason I should care for Mr. Tomlyn."

"Then if there *is* nobody else, what have you to object to in him?" asked Mrs. Williams, looking as if she thought Polly the

most unreasonable girl in the world. "He's good-looking, quite good-looking enough, that is; handsome men never make good husbands,—and he has money, and is disposed to behave very liberally by you, Polly; and you know, situated as you are, you never can expect such another chance."

"I didn't expect this one," cried Polly; "and I'm sure I wish I hadn't had it. But I don't like Mr. Tomlyn, and though I don't see the necessity of marriage, for I think a woman can get along very well by herself, still I think if a girl *does* marry, she ought to be sure that she loves with all her heart, and all her soul, and all her strength, the man she marries, just as the Catechism says she should love her God."

"Polly!" cried Mrs. Williams, looking a little shocked, and having an idea that Polly was rather profane in quoting the Catechism.

"Well, now I couldn't love Mr. Tomlyn like that, could I?" asked Polly, heedless of the interruption; "and he wouldn't understand it if I did. It would rather bore him, and we shouldn't get on together. He doesn't want a wife any more than the Grand Turk! It's a well-dressed piece of goods he is looking out for to complete the furniture of his fine house when he gets it—a showy sort of a slave. Not a servant; servants can give warning, and change their places when they are tired of them. Oh! the way I've heard that man speak of women! it's made my blood boil! 'Women should know their place and keep it!' 'What is a wife made for but to study her husband!' Ten to one but he'll marry a woman who'll make him do just as she pleases, and he'll think he's got his foot on her neck all the time. Ugh! he shall never think for a moment he's got it on mine."

"I daresay he'll want managing," said Mrs. Williams; "a great many men do. But a wife that knew how to manage him might be very happy."

"I couldn't," said Polly. "I don't want to marry; I never think about it; it doesn't seem in my way. But if ever I do, I shall not only want to be able to respect and love and honor my husband with all my heart, but I shall expect him to respect and honor and love me. Now, what does Mr. Tomlyn know of respect and honor as applied to women? He could give neither, even to his wife."

"I'm afraid you're sadly romantic, Polly," said Mrs. Williams, shaking her head.

"Mandie always said I was so strong-minded and sensible. Never mind, one's none the worse for a little romance, if God puts it in us, than one is for the flowers that He sends. Potatoes and carrots are good, but I like roses as well."

"You may live to want potatoes," said Mrs. Williams, with a faint, wintry smile. "Oh, Polly! to think of what you are throwing away!"

"I never was afraid of work," said Polly: "and when I go away from here some other door will open to me. I seem to be gathering up my strength while I'm waiting here, ready for another fight with the world when you don't want me any more, or I see a chance of making a little more money than you can afford to give. But I'm very happy as I am, and in no hurry to go; and I certainly won't go away to be Mrs. Tomyln."

Mrs. Williams felt herself worsted, and said no more; but went downstairs presently, with the conviction that she had done her duty and failed, and that Mr. Tomyln could require no more of her, and at the same time with a pleased consciousness that Polly Brooke was not going to leave her just yet.

"For I should never get another like her," she said. "No, not for twice the money, if I could afford to give it."

CHAPTER XII.

A TANGLED SKEIN.

GORDON TYNSDELL sat alone in his back parlor. He had just finished his fifth cup of tea, and eaten a black and greasy mutton-chop, which Mrs. Sims had deigned to cook for him at five o'clock, in consideration of his having had no dinner; having, for once, been too busy to find time to eat one. He had rung the bell, and was waiting, with exemplary patience, till Mrs. Sims should condescend to answer it and clear the tea-things away; and she was sitting by the kitchen fire—a much better one than her master, at the present price of coal, ever thought he could afford for himself—toasting her slipshod feet, eating hot buttered toast, such as she would never have made for her master, having a regard for his pocket, as she told him a dozen times a week, and drinking tea of a strength she never allowed him. She heard the bell, and, shifting her feet, said,—"Let him wait. Once use folks to bein' answered directly they takes it into their heads they wants you, an' they always looks for it."

She poured herself out another cup of tea,—her so-called master upstairs would have thought himself fortunate if his had been half so good,—and was just reaching out her hand for another piece of toast, when a ring, sharp, loud, and imperative, summoned her to her feet and to the door. She always answered *that* bell quickly. If her master's patients, or those who came on their behalf, were kept waiting, it might be a bad thing for him, and, consequently, for her. "That ought to be a broken leg, or a confinement come on sudden," she said to herself. "Well, he's finished his tea, and hadn't ought to complain, even if he is kept out late. I hope he'll come up quietly, though, if he is; I hate to be woke out o' my first sleep by any one a creakin' an' a tumblin' up the stairs, just as if there was nobody in the house but theirselves. But men has no consideration, ever, though this one isn't as bad as some I've known on."

By this time she had reached the door, and, opening it, the gas-light fell on a tall, slight figure, and a young, handsome, but worn face. The night was a miserable one—rain, and snow, and sleet around, and mud, horrid, slimy, greasy, London mud, an inch deep, on the ground. Perhaps the stranger was anxious to find shelter from it, for, after asking impatiently if Mr. Tynsdell were within, he hurried into the house almost before the ancient serving-woman had time to answer in the affirmative, and, pushing his way past her, seemed to find his way by some instinct to the back parlor—

for she was certain he had never been in the house before—and closed the door almost in her face.

"That's manners," said Mrs. Sims, indignantly. "One of his relations, I shouldn't wonder. There's something of the same cut about him. Well, I'd have finished my tea before I'd have gone to the door to have let him in, if I'd only known; an' if *he* wants fresh tea, he'll have to wait for it," she added, with a little spite. "There's not a drop of bilin' water in the kettle."

Meanwhile, the gentleman who had been shown, or rather who had shown himself, into the back parlor, had removed his hat from his eyes, and, wiping the rain-drops from his forehead, stood looking at the occupant of the chair by the fire-side. Gordon Tynsdell sprang to his feet. "My dear fellow! what on earth brings you here such a night as this? It's bad enough for poor devils who, like myself, are too glad of work to mind what weather it is they've the chance of doing it in, but you—"

"I wanted to see you, and I couldn't stand about the weather, and it didn't rain, and if it had I should have come all the same," said the other, in a dull, weary monotone—a voice that, coming from so young a man, sounded as if it was the dirge of hope, and energy, and early promise. "What should I care about the weather for? As if it mattered to a living soul whether I caught my death of cold, as the old women say, or not."

"You're not going to catch it now, if I can help it," said the other, in a tone he might have used to a patient slightly refractory. "Take off your wet coat; and will you have some tea?—or perhaps it had better be brandy-and-water?"

"Yes, give me some brandy: it's a long walk here from the station. I didn't think it was so far, and I'd some trouble in finding my way. What on earth makes you live in such an out-of-the-way part of the world?"

"Because I thought I should find something to do in it, but I don't think I proved myself a wise man when I came to the east, for the work is little, and the pay is less." He rang the bell, but Mrs. Sims knew what was due to herself too well to answer, and proceeded with the buttering of yet another round of toast, when she was astounded by the sight of her master in the kitchen.

"Deaf, eh, Mrs. Sims? I thought I rang pretty loudly, too. Got any boiling water? No? Where's the kettle? We'll soon have some. That's capital toast—go on with the buttering;" and he proceeded to half fill the kettle—a small iron one—himself, and placed it on the fire. Then he looked about for a tumbler, and put it on the tray. "Now, take the kettle upstairs. 'Tisn't a first-rate fire, but I've some one there I don't like to leave; and clear away the tea-things. I'll follow with the tray."

He did so: but the tray bore Mrs. Sims's round of well-buttered toast, which he placed on the hob to keep hot while the kettle was boiling. The old woman cleared away with a sulky, aggrieved air, of which her master took not the slightest notice; and as soon as she had made her exit, which she was a perversely long time in doing, and he had made his guest some hot brandy-and-water, and prevailed on him to take a piece of toast with it, he said,—"When

you have taken that, perhaps you will tell me how things are going on with you."

This was spoken in the tone of one who did not expect to hear that "things were going" well with the man he addressed, but who felt a great interest and pity in him. Now they were by the fire, the likeness between these two—both sons of one father—manifested itself more closely than when they were apart. There was the same broad, open forehead, the hair and eyes were of the same color, and the complexion had the same tone, only in one it was bronzed by a greater exposure to the weather than the other had ever known. But the unlikeness showed itself too. Gordon Tynsdell's eyes had a clear, fearless outlook, the good-tempered lips were firm and resolute as well as good-tempered; but in Horace Gordon's face there was, all through, a weakness—a timidity—not physical, that spoiled the whole, and but for which he would have been a much handsomer man than his brother.

"Things have been going as my worst enemy could wish them. I think I'm punished enough, Gordon," he said.

The look of pity on the other's face deepened. There was in his manner something of the regard which a much older brother might show to one younger and weaker. It was not merely pity, but affection—an affection which was almost strange, considering their relative positions, and the fact that some sons might have been disposed to show the more favored one the resentment called forth by the injuries sustained at the hands of their common father. "Punishment!" The poor weakling before him—whom everybody liked, who was always so popular because of the very pleasantness and facile temper that had led to his ruin—would have enough of that to bear without a word from him.

"Have you seen your mother yet?" he asked.

"No; she doesn't care to see me, and I have no wish to force my presence on her; but I *have* seen Millicent Pembury again."

"Well?"

"And I thought I should find myself forgiven at last. She seemed near relenting. Gordon, it was my one chance! If she would but have been my wife, I should be another man. But she is as good as my mother, and as pitiless! I had almost won her over,—a little more and I think she would have been my own again,—and then we were interrupted; some girl came into the room, and she kept near her. I suppose even then she was thinking better—or worse—of it; but she promised to write, and she did write; and look, this is all the saint can say to the sinner!"

He gave Gordon Tynsdell a note, in which Millicent Pembury had written a few words of farewell—a farewell, she told him, that must be a final one. It was coldly, almost stiffly worded. The unhappy girl, while writing it, had been afraid to say too much, lest she should betray how much the writing cost her. If Horace Gordon could have read it rightly, he would have seen how much the very stiffness and formality, coming from such a girl as Millicent, conveyed. But, though he knew Millicent, he did not understand her as did Gordon Tynsdell, who did not know her at all.

"She's going back to the Hall, you see, where she thinks she will be safe from me; and she wishes me well, and there's an end—an

end of everything, so far as I am concerned. For her—she will marry that fellow Milburne most likely, and be a model wife and mother; while, for aught she cares, I may go to the devil!"

"Hadn't you turned your face in that direction before Miss Pembury broke with you?" asked Gordon Tynsdell. "I'm not going to preach, my dear fellow; but how you could expect a girl to look over such an offense as yours, beats me. And it does seem to me, that all through, you forget that other, who, let her have wronged Mr. Towers as she may, has some claim on you."

"I suppose you think," said Horace, moodily, "that I ought to marry her? I believe my mother is of the same opinion. Lord help us both! We shall be a happy couple if I do!"

"I don't see anything else for it," said Gordon, gravely. "You can't send her to her ruin."

"Poor creature, no! I can never come back to England in that case," he said, looking up at his brother. "Not to Hertfordshire, at any rate. I couldn't ask my mother to leave the place to make way for Adela. If Milly had gone there, I daresay she would never have left it. I should never like to meet the people about there. They were none too fond of my father, and they would say I am his worthy son."

He leaned back with folded arms, looking moodily in the fire, as if trying to read there his future story. And Gordon Tynsdell looked on him, pityingly, and almost hopelessly. He had set his whole life wrong, and how was it to be righted? By nothing but by hurling the wretched creature who had sinned with him yet deeper and deeper into destruction. That was the one chance for him; and Gordon felt that if he were base enough and coward enough to take it, he should despise him for ever.

"What are your plans for the present?' he said, almost because he hardly knew what else to say.

"I don't know. *She* is staying in Paris still. I suppose I must go back to her soon. There is nothing for me to do here; and I suppose, too, that when we are married we must go knocking about the Continent, leading the life that other disreputables lead. We shall be always on the shady side of the wall now. I wonder how it will feel to be in the shade—to have people look coldly, or not look at all, or be just civil to you, and make up for it by cutting your wife. Poor Adela! It will be hard on her, any way," he said, with a little relenting in his face. "We shall both go down, lower and lower. Curious feeling it must be to go sinking into the pit, and feel the mud rising to your very throat. And I suppose by-and-by the mud won't seem mud—we shall get so used to it; and the unclean creatures with whom we shall have to mix won't seem so unclean when we have become like them. Steadily downwards! That's what lies before one. Adela and I have to sink, sink, till we are out of sight of all you good respectables, and are on a comfortable level with the rest of the *vauriens* who make the best of their lost lives by herding together. Poor girl! That's what she and I have got to come to!"

"I'd be hanged if I would!" cried Gordon Tynsdell, starting up with such energy, that the poker and tongs, stationed on either side of the fireplace, fell down with a clatter that made Mrs. Sims, in the

kitchen beneath, arrive at the conclusion that the young men had quarreled.

"Just what might be expected. Comin' out on such a night, a-traspesin' over the place with his muddy boots, an' me havin' my toast carried off before my very eyes."

She drank her tea with redoubled relish as she thought of the quarrel she imagined up-stairs, but certainly there was nothing further from Gordon Tynsdell's mind than quarreling, at that moment.

"I wouldn't do it," he repeated. "Look here, Horace, you're in a devil of a mess, there's no doubt of it. Turn it which way you will, you're about in as awkward a scrape as a fellow can well be in. But I wouldn't sink to the society of scoundrels, or let my wife mix with demi-reps. Poor thing! you've dragged her low enough without that. If I'd got a patient with an arm wasted up to the elbow, do you think I'd tell him to lie down and die while he'd got two sound legs to stand on, and another arm to work with? You've gone wrong, and you've done wrong, awfully wrong, but you're not to *be* wrong altogether, to the end of your days. Pluck up a heart, man, for your own sake and that of the poor creature who will have to bear the brunt a great deal more than you will. Don't go mixing with the scum and riffraff that's always floating about on the Continent, by way of society. Better go without society at all. You've got each other, and for God's sake try and make the best, not the worst, of each other. By and by come back to England, to Hertfordshire, even; it's your place, and do your duty in it as far as circumstances allow. You can't make life what it would have been if this had not occurred, but it needn't be an utter wreck either for you or for the woman you must make your wife."

"If I were like you, Gordon," said the other, hopelessly, "I might do as you say—but then, if I had been like you I should never have made such a mess of my life as I have done. We ought to have changed places. It's a pity for my mother's sake we can't—poor Adela! poor girl! it is hard on her—but even making her my wife won't set things straight, you see," he added, as if with a furtive hope that his brother might take another view of the case.

"But you must set them straight for her as far as you can," said the other, almost sternly. "If you have wronged one woman, is that any reason why you should wrong another, and one ten times more to be pitied? There! sit down like a good fellow," for Horace had risen with a movement of anger; "let's talk the thing over quietly. When we've done our best to set things straight, we shall have but a tangled coil after all."

A coil that nothing ever would set right again. Over in Paris, Adela Towers was wearing her heart away, wondering when the man, for whom she had risked and lost all, would return. Her beauty was fast going, and she was only seven-and twenty. Her cheeks were haggard, her eyes unnaturally bright, and if her beauty went, how should she keep him?—and she had nothing else but him.

He had taken good rooms for her in one of the quietest hotels he could find; and the people were attentive, and she had a carriage at her command. Everything that money could do for her, Horace

Gordon was ready enough to do. But she could not hide from herself that his love was fading fast. She had not yet learned that his love had never really been hers at all. He had been a month away, and had only written twice—coldly, almost formally—and he had not answered the last passionate letter she had sent him, in which she urged him to come back at once, and save her from the loneliness that was so maddening.

It was now just two days since Horace's visit to his brother; the early winter night was closing in; Adela had driven out—a stranger, as it seemed to her, amongst a crowd of strangers; and then she had sat at her window watching the people as they went past, gaily dressed women with their children, busy men, idle loungers—all the stir of a life from which she now seemed as much shut out as if she were in her grave. As the night fell in, a horrible sense of desolation came over her—that intense, intolerable depression which sometimes drives women to drink, sometimes to suicide. She had left all for Horace, and Horace seemed to have left her. If he did not come back—if he deserted her as she had deserted her husband! What was there to bind him to her? Love—it had gone by. Honor—the very word between those two seemed a mockery. What would become of her if he never came back? What did women do who fell as she had fallen? After—after—she shuddered at that "after" as if a grave had opened at her feet, and shown her its ghastly tenants—after betrayal as she had betrayed? Did they sink to such infamy as she had heard of, and sometimes, from her carriage windows, seen flaunting in the gas-lit streets? Or did they kill themselves at once, because life had become too horrible? Oh! but she could not die—what was there beyond the grave? She had become a sinner.

All the threatenings which had once seemed to go by her as things with which she, and such as she, had nothing to do—mere meaningless words which passed idly over her head—now seemed living, terrible realties. Such a little while back, and, if her life had not been linked to good, it had at least been free from harm; and now she was as one of the outcasts of the earth—one to whom her own mother would send no word or sign, whose sisters would suffer through the shame of her misdoings. Of all in this great city, whose life was surging all around her, she seemed the most wretched and most utterly alone.

Would Horace make her his wife? That would not set things right. That would not make her as she had been before. She knew well that, for such as she there was no complete rehabilitation. But still, compared to what she should be if he did not marry her, she should be saved. She dared not think of how it would be with her if he did not.

There was a quick step in the corridor outside, and the door was opened. Horace came in, looking paler and more worn than when he had gone away—like a man who had seen the worst, and made up his mind to bear it. He bent over her, and kissed her—a cold, formal, duty kiss, that seemed to freeze the cheek it fell on. Then he sat down, and asked her how she had been during his absence. There was a forced kindness about him from which she augured the worst. There was no solicitude—much less love—in his ques-

tions. Had he come to tell her that all was over between them—that he was tired of her, and it would be best to part? She sat with burning lips and a choking in her throat, and he went on, with his eyes bent on the ground.

"Our case is coming on soon; it is likely to be heard before Christmas. We have no defense to make, and I shall put in none. The Court will be sure to give Tower the divorce he wants, and as soon as that is so, we must marry."

He said the words as if he had learned them by rote, and compelled himself to say them. She knew that it was by an effort he uttered them, that while telling her he must make her his wife he had not one particle of love for her. It was only pity and a sense of justice. And on her side, too, she felt that love had failed. She was not a woman to go on giving and have nothing back. They must live together all their days, and all affection was at an end, and they knew too much of each other ever to hope it would be born again. Her only hope in this world was to be linked to this man, and yet if she could have redeemed herself in any other way, how gladly would she have consented never to see him more. Like Francesca and her lover, these two had destroyed each other, and had to bear their punishment together; but Dante might have added a sharper pain to his unhappy lovers—have increased their sufferings a hundredfold, if like these two, he had made them lovers no more.

CHAPTER XIII.

AMANDA.

"MANDIE," Mrs. Brooke, or Amanda, Polly's step-mamma, was just as helpless and as inefficient as women with sentimental names, savouring of the novels of the last century, generally are. Who would ever expect any good, useful work to be performed by a Selina or an Albina? Whether the name forms the character, or is given by an inspiration, it is impossible to say; but the witless, shiftless women, doomed to drag down the luckless men they marry, and by some unhappy fate, unhappy, at least, for men, are sure to *be* married; the soft, pithless, sapless parasites of feminine humanity are almost certain to have such names as Strephon might have woven into his verses if Chloë had been cruel to him, or Damon have piped about to his sheep if Phillis had turned a deaf ear to his warblings.

"Mandie," or Mrs. Brooke, was as pretty as a wax-doll in a shop-window. She had pink cheeks, that never got vulgarly red or flushed; and blue eyes—the pale, passionless blue of the old-fashioned willow-pattern plates—she had fair hair, and a well-formed figure a little under the middle height, and with a slight, a very slight, tendency to *embonpoint*. She had married Mr. Brooke when she was seventeen, and she never forgot what a very youthful bride she had been, and never suffered any one else to forget it. She was a girl then—"a mere child," as she was in the habit of speaking of herself, and, to all practical intents and purposes, a mere child she was likely to remain to the end of her days.

Mr. Brooke had been five-and-twenty years older than his wife; and Polly, her step-daughter, was just three years younger than her new mamma when she came home. Polly would much rather her father had not married; "we were getting on so nicely together," she said. Polly had pronounced herself fit to leave school when she was thirteen, and, since then, had been her father's companion and adviser-in-chief. It was when he was away from home on a short holiday that he had seen Amanda, fallen in love, and proposed at the end of a fortnight. He was not Amanda's first love by any means. She had had a succession of sweethearts ever since she was five years old—women of her stamp are wonderfully precocious in some things, if they never attain maturity in others—but Mr. Brooke was the first who had made her an offer, and she was very proud of being married before the other girls of her acquaintance; and, her home being a dull farm-house in one of the midland countries, she was very glad to exchange it for Mr. Brooke's house in London,

Mr. Brooke was a chemist, and he lived in one of the dingy streets that turn off from Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street. He was not a successful man, being too much given to the theoretical part of his business. In the mediæval ages he would certainly have been an alchemist, or died in the belief that he was just on the point of discovering the elixir of life. As it was, he was for ever about to find some new dye, which should eclipse every other color in brilliancy, and be the fashion in every European capital; or he was just going to find some new deodorizer, which would make a dung-heap into a bouquet, and an open sewer more fragrant than a garden of roses.

But nothing came of his discoveries. The dyes were lovely when inclosed in a well-stoppered glass bottle, but as soon as they were applied to any fabric they evaporated, and left not a tinge behind. The deodorizers were worse; *they* evaporated too, but not without leaving a perfume to which that of the nuisances they were supposed to counteract was as attar of roses. And, while Mr. Brooke was making these experiments, he was neglecting his business, letting drugs that were in daily requisition run out before he ordered more, forgetting to make up prescriptions that were required immediately, and suffering the whole shop to assume an air of neglect and untidiness.

When Polly came home from school things were a little better. She saw that the errand boy kept the windows bright, and swept the shop out daily; and she got up early of a morning to dust and arrange the shelves. She looked after the prescriptions too, and reminded her father to make them up in due time; and she made herself acquainted with the names of the drugs in the different drawers and jars, and saw that these were duly replenished. Altogether, Mr. Brooke would have done very well if he had only been content with his daughter, who was as practical and helpful as, by some blessed compensation of Providence, the wives and daughters of dreamers so often are: but, unhappily for himself, he saw Amanda, and, as Polly said, "Not having me with him, he must needs get into mischief and marry her."

Polly made the best of her step-mother, just as she made the best of

everything. She gave her up the keys very dutifully, but as Amanda was always leaving them about, and one servant stole the brandy and got tipsy therewith, and the next pawned six of Mr. Brooke's new shirts, Polly took possession of the keys again, and Amanda acquiesced in her doing so. As to the house-keeping money, Amanda finding it impossible to make it suffice, Polly took the management of that also, so that she became again, just as she had been before her step-mamma came home, the virtual head of the household; only, as Amanda was tiresome and troublesome and difficult to please, and had sometimes little fits of dignity and tetchiness, the work was rather harder than it had been before.

Then the babies came. Amanda was as delighted with the first a a child with her new doll, and took about as much care of it. The baby died, as might have been expected, and the next had the same fate. Amanda cried a little, but not too much, for fear of discoloring her complexion and making her eyes red. When the third baby came, Polly took charge of it just as she had done of the keys and the housekeeping money; and did the like when the fourth made its appearance, though by this time her cares had increased through Mr. Brooke's being a confirmed invalid.

Amanda did nothing but look pretty, unless a little crochet or tatting might be called work. She had married at seventeen, and she seemed determined to remain seventeen for ever. She was always bewailing her girlishness and her youth, as if they were both incurable complaints. The possibility of growing out of either never seemed to occur to her. Then Mr. Brooke died, and the young wife looked even younger as a widow, and her girlishness became still more obtrusive. She went home, taking the babies with her. Polly wound up her father's affairs, and found, when everything had been paid off, there was nothing left. Amanda cried a little when she heard this, but not very much. She had always found somebody ready to take care of her, because she was too helpless to take care of herself, and she had no doubt that she should do so now.

Fortunately, her mother and her two sisters were fond of children. The latter were, both, older than Amanda, and she had been in the habit of saying little, pointless sarcasms at them as old maids —creatures who had failed to fulfill the destiny marked out for them by Providence. She gave the children up to them as a matter of course, and contented herself with being as ornamental and as useless in her father's house as she had been in her husband's; while Polly gladly accepted the situation which Mrs. Williams offered her as nursery governess, till, as that lady said, something better should turn up.

"You may leave me when it does, Miss Brooke, and I shall not blame you. I can't afford to give a high salary; still, it is a safe home, and it is not quite like going amongst strangers, as Mr. Williams knew your poor papa so long."

"Miss Brooke" soon became "Polly," and Mrs. Williams began to wonder how she should do without her if the something better did "turn up." And now that Amanda was provided for, and the babies likely to be taken care of, Polly, when the first grief at the loss of her father had subsided, began to feel more at rest than

she had done for years. There was no rent to meet; no assistant's salary to provide for; no housekeeping expenses to be checked. She was at rest for a time, though many people would have thought the entire children, and a never-ending amount of needlework, a very fair amount of labor.

A short time before the memorable morning when the "baby" had been brought comatose to Mr. Williams's, and given the four girls residing under his roof a common object of interest, an event had occurred which promised to make a greater difference in Mrs. Brooke's life than even the "baby" had done to Madge or Susan. This was a visit from her maternal uncle to her father's farm at Highleigh. Mr. Sampson had never seen his sister since her marriage. They had, both of them, always been too busy for the exchange of visits. Mrs. Long had her dairy, her fowls, and her children; and the expense of a visit to town would have been more than she would have liked; and Mr. Sampson had his business, from which, till he married, he rarely absented himself for a single day.

When he married, his wife took him with her every autumn to Margate or Brighton; and then, as times went on, and their circumstances improved, he had to do as others did in his position, and visit Paris or go up the Rhine, when he would much rather have been in his counting-house. Still, he always gave way to his wife in trifles; and there was a slight amount of ostentation in his character which made these Continental visits not unpleasant, much as he disliked the *table-d'hôte* and the foreign mode of living altogether. They showed that he could afford to spend as much money as did others, upon his pleasure-seeking; like the diamond studs he wore in his frilled shirt-front on gala occasions, or the pictures he hung on his walls, they were manifestations of the wealth which it had been the business of his existence to acquire.

For thirty years of his married life Mr. Sampson had lived in one house, a solid, red brick mansion, with a court-yard in front, and a large garden behind, at Hackney. The house came to him from his wife's father, and, in Mr. Sampson's opinion, there was not its equal in the kingdom. It was well and solidly built; some rich City merchant, in the beginning of the last century, had erected it and retired there, delighting in it as a place not too far from his familiar haunts and his old friends, while yet pleasantly near to green fields and rural sights. Hackney had been in the country then, and wealthy City men had built themselves one good house after another in it and its environs; and to Mr. Sampson it was still as rural and as pleasant as when he first came to reside there thirty years ago.

Some of his friends had gone to Stamford Hill; others had stretched their wings, and flown ten or twelve miles off, for the sake of having a "place" in the country; but Mr. Sampson still adhered to the old-fashioned suburb, and the old-fashioned house in it. There was no need, he said, to tire himself with a railway journey as he went to and from his place of business; his phaeton, drawn by a stout, gray cob, carried him there and back in all weathers. If it rained, he pulled the hood forward, and the leathern apron well up; if it was fine, he could enjoy the ride at his leisure.

But, hail or rain, snow or sunshine, to and from Mincing Lane he went in his phaeton, with ten times the security and comfort that he would have known if borne at the rate of forty miles an hour behind a steam-engine.

He was old-fashioned in many of his ways—a citizen of a bygone type. He believed in the Lord Mayor as the greatest of earthly dignitaries. He had never tried for the honor himself, because he doubted his fitness to fill it properly, and, perhaps, too, shrunk from the expenditure it might call forth. If ostentatious, and anxious to vie with his fellow citizens in some things, there was a homely, shrewd sturdiness in the man which prevented his ever vying with those of a higher class than his own. He had no wish for fashion; and although, long since, he could have afforded a house in Tyburnia, and as fashionable an equipage as is ever seen in the Parks, he eschewed all such vanities as unbecoming his station. There might be something of the "pride that apes humility" in this, and something, too, of a love of ease. It was less trouble to laugh at the follies of fashion than to conform to its edicts; and life, if more homely, was, perhaps, more comfortable at the East than at the West; while the journey to the City from Bayswater or Kensington would have been decidedly more than the old gray cob could accomplish.

His wife had suited him admirably. Their tastes and feelings had harmonized in most things. They both liked the table, and she was an excellent cook, and trained her servants in her own ways. They had no children, but they never wanted any, and life flowed on in a very pleasant routine of money-making and dinner-eating, varied by those trips to the sea-side or the Continent of which I have spoken, till Mrs. Sampson was suddenly carried away from her husband by a fit of apoplexy—the only time in all their long acquaintance that she had ever seriously vexed him.

He was inconsolable for a little time. He lost his appetite, and made mistakes in his books. He was thrown out of his grooves altogether by this event; it was something wholly unforeseen and unlooked-for. In his scheme of life death had never found a place; and now Death had come and taken away, not only his wife but his housekeeper. He felt very lonely when he came home. His wife and he had never had much to talk about. He was not a man to take a woman into his confidence in any matter of business, still less to talk to her of the news of the day or the things about which he would converse with his fellow-men; but he had liked to see her sitting opposite to him at the dinner-table or the fireplace. His house did not seem the same now she was no longer there. It looked empty and unfurnished, and yet he could not bear to leave it. He could not relish his meals when they were eaten alone; he missed the rustle of his wife's dress, the murmuring sound of her voice. "A house without a mistress in it," he said, in the desperation of his loneliness, "is worse than no house at all."

Then he remembered his sister and her daughters. Why should not one of the latter come and keep his house for him? They must be quite old enough by this time; he had not a clear idea of their ages, but they must be women grown: indeed, one of them had married some years since, and he had sent her a gold watch and

chain at the time. She was a widow now, poor thing; his own bereavement made him feel for her; she might be glad of a home, or, if she could not leave her children—he could not be troubled with children—he might have one of her sisters to live with him.

But he meant to say nothing of these his intentions until he had seen the girls; therefore he simply wrote to his sister inviting himself to pay her a visit, and went down, as soon as he had heard from her that there was the warmest of welcomes waiting him at Highleigh, taking with him a turbot, a barrel of oysters, and four black-silk dresses, of a quality which made even Mrs. Long, who cared as little for the pomps and vanities as any woman living, exult in their richness when she saw herself and her daughters attired in them.

Mr. Sampson meant to choose the best of the three girls, and he watched them narrowly in accordance with this resolve. Amanda knew what he had come for, and resolved that he should choose her. As to leaving the babies, Patty and Peggy could mind them. What were old maids good for but to take charge of the children of their married sisters? And the little ones would be a great deal better in the country than in town.

Amanda was no fool—intellectually. She had been stupid at school, and her mother had pronounced her hopelessly stupid in household matters. But there are fools and fools—clever fools, who make such magnificent blunders that you might sometimes take them for geniuses; good-natured fools, who are always committing one mistake or another, very often to the cost of others besides themselves; selfish fools, who live for nothing but themselves; and cunning fools, who sometimes succeed where cleverer people would fail. Amanda was both cunning and selfish; she had decided on returning to town with Uncle Sampson, and she worked steadfastly, with all the powers of her small wits, to achieve that end. She adopted a plaintive style which suited her prettiness admirably, and harmonized just now with Mr. Sampson's own feelings. She always managed to be in the way when the postman brought him his *Times*, so that she might hand it to him herself. She was always ready to take a walk with him, when Peggy, perhaps, would be minding the children, and Patty busy in the kitchen. She echoed his opinions, and looked docility and sweetness to the life. Uncle Sampson fell in love with her as much as an uncle can with a niece, and then took his sister into his confidence and asked her how, supposing he took Amanda back to town with him, the children would get on.

"Peggy will see to them," said Mrs. Long. "She is as fond of them as if they were her own, already."

She did not think it fair to tell Uncle Sampson that it was Peggy who "saw to them" almost entirely, as it was. If there was a good chance opening before Amanda, it was not for her mother to spoil it. She did, however, think it her duty toward her brother to say—

"If you want a housekeeper, Patty will do very much better than Amanda."

But Patty was loud-voiced, stout, and rather plain. She would never lighten up the house as would the little pink and white woman, with her low voice and her subservient ways. Besides, Patty

had a decisive way of speaking; was apt to express her opinion on any matter that came under her notice, no matter whether it was within a woman's province or not. Mr. Sampson thought she might rule him as well as his house. He disliked women with a will of their own, and Peggy was a confirmed old maid, as Mrs. Brooke was in the habit of saying in her pretty, girlish way; he should never like to see any one so precise and stiff in the place of his late wife. Besides, Peggy was better where she was, minding the pretty creature's children; and the pretty creature should come with him.

Amanda was delighted to come, but she did not show all her delight. She talked a little about parting with her babies; then said, if dear Uncle Sampson thought she should make him happy in his bereavement, it was her duty to go. She knew what bereavement was herself. Then she cried a little; her tears were always very near her eyes—much nearer than they were to her heart. Uncle Sampson gave her twenty pounds to spend for the little ones, and told her that, though he had no accommodation in his house for them, he should never forget the sacrifice she made, and would look after them when they grew older. The little ones were very shabby. Peggy and Patty had bought their last new shoes out of their own pocket money, and their grandmother had gone without a new winter bonnet to find them warm underclothing.

There was always plenty, and to spare, of a plain kind on the table at Highleigh; but money was never too plentiful, so Amanda gave five out of the twenty pounds to Peggy to spend for the children, and kept the other fifteen for her own requirements. And a day or two after, she went away, with her handkerchief to her eyes, and Uncle Sampson carried her off in triumph to London, believing that she really had sacrificed her maternal feelings on his behalf. How was it possible for a man to think anything else of a woman who looked so lovely when she held her children in her arms, and cried so becomingly at parting from them?

"I doubt your Uncle John's got a bad bargain," said Mrs. Long to her girls, as the fly drove off to the station with the travelers. "Anyway, it was his own doing, and he isn't married to her, so he can send her back when he knows a little more of her."

"She won't let him know too much," said Patty. "Amanda's clever enough to throw dust in the eyes of a wiser man than Uncle John."

"And she's left the children behind her," said Aunt Peggy, kissing first one and then the other; "so she's welcome to stop away as long as she pleases; and she *will* stop, you'll see," she added, significantly. "Uncle John isn't the only man who can't see in this world."

CHAPTER XIV.

POLLY'S VISIT TO HER STEP-MAMMA.

When Amanda was comfortably settled in her new abode, and had bought herself some suitable dresses in which to receive her friends—Mr. Sampson had given her another twenty pounds for her-

self the day after they came to London—she wrote to Polly, telling her of her change of residence, and asking her to come and see her. She wished Polly to see her in her new state, and besides she felt, as she said, that she ought to take a little notice of her late husband's daughter; for she had liked Polly as much as it was easy for her to like anything. Besides, Polly had always been so useful, and there was no knowing when she might be of use again.

Just at that time Polly was looking forward to a change in her own arrangements, which would necessitate her leaving London, and, therefore, she was very glad to go and see Amanda, as she thought she could couple her visit to her with one to "the baby," which she had not seen for above a month.

Madge had never been to see "baby" since it had been domiciled with Mrs. Smith. She had been conducting herself better lately—a few grains of intelligence seemed to have pierced through the dense crust of her stolidity. Polly had tried hard to break through it, but she had not much time to give to the development of Madge; and Susan had left off talking of resigning her situation if Madge remained. "She *did* behave like a Christian to the baby," Susan said, "and one ought to make allowances for her bringing-up." Polly had asked Mrs. Williams to allow Madge to accompany her on her visit to the baby; and accordingly Madge, dressed in her best, accompanied her.

Susan had done her utmost, out of sheer good-nature, to spoil that best. The severe simplicity of Madge's toilet—regulated by the taste of the workhouse matron, with such additions as Mrs. Williams thought proper—did not please her at all. She took a great red rose out of her own bonnet, and stuck it in the neat black straw Madge wore; and she lent her a new mock ermine muff and a very gay neck-tie.

"That's a little more like," she said, when she surveyed her; and Madge herself looked pleased with her appearance. Polly had been too busy up to the last moment to notice it, and then there was no time to make alterations, even if she had chosen to hurt the feelings of the two girls by doing so. Madge was thoroughly pleased with her finery. She sat upright in the railway carriage, with her hands half in the muff—it was so small she could not get them quite in; and though the rose, which had been fastened in very hurriedly, kept falling forward and getting into her eyes, and the scarlet neck-tie was not half so warm as the little black-and-white plaid which it replaced, she would not have parted with her finery on any account.

"If I were going to stop in Wurtemburg Street," thought Polly, "I'd see if Mrs. Williams wouldn't let me smarten that girl's dress up for her. The pomps and vanities of this wicked world will be good for something if they teach poor Madge she *is* a girl and a human being. At any rate, I'll give her a bow for her throat and another for her cap before I go."

The door of Mr. Sampson's house was opened by a man-servant out of livery, looking thoroughly well fed, well paid, and certainly not overworked. From the large flagged hall, Polly went up a broad staircase, with carved oaken balusters, into a drawing-room overlooking the garden at the back of the house. There were evergreens in abundance in the garden, and some fine old trees at the

further end, whose foliage in summer concealed the tall chimneys of the neighboring factories which had sprung up one after another around the house, since it had been first built as a pleasant country residence.

The room was handsomely furnished in the fashion of thirty years ago, though chairs and couches, and even the carpet, were all carefully covered. Mrs. Sampson had been a very frugal woman, and liked to have best and second-best things, and this had been her state apartment, wholly reserved for company and formal calls. She had never used it as her ordinary sitting-room, but Amanda did so, and had a fire in it every day, telling her uncle the furniture was getting ruined through damp. She had not yet ventured to do away with the brown-holland covers, but they were doomed. Amanda was only waiting her time.

"Mandie has got into comfortable quarters," thought Polly, looking round; "I didn't know she had any relations so well off;" and presently Mandie came rustling in, her long silk skirts flowing behind her, her hair elaborately dressed, and two white-crape lappets, supposed to do duty as a widow's cap, falling over it. She was smiling and pretty, and kissed Polly very affectionately; and then she sank back on a lounge, spread her dress gracefully around her, and said,—

"Well, dear, you see I've made a move for the better."

"It looks like it," said Polly; "and what have you done with the babies?"

"Peggy looks to them; it's all she's fit for," said Mrs. Brooke, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Besides, I couldn't have them with me. Uncle Sampson doesn't like children, and they're much better where they are."

"There's no doubt about that," said Polly, "unless you've altered very much in the twelvemonth since I last saw you."

"Well, Polly, what can you expect?" said Amanda, plaintively, "When a girl marries as young as I did, how *is* she to know anything about children? Why, just consider, I was scarcely seventeen."

"You're five-and-twenty now, though," said Polly, pitilessly. "But you certainly are not fit to manage children. How is it about the house! I thought you were to be Mr. Sampson's housekeeper. I should think you must find it rather more difficult than keeping house for poor papa. There wasn't much money, I know, but then he was always so easy to please."

"Well, I manage," said Amanda, with a little mystery. "Cook and I understand one another. She was with Mrs. Sampson five years, and so got into Uncle Sampson's ways. When I came she intimated that she didn't like ladies in her kitchen. She had put up with it from Mrs. Sampson, but wasn't disposed to put up with it from anyone else, and I might rely upon her doing her duty, and so forth. Like the rest of them, she wants to be mistress, and so I let her—in her place. It's much better to give way in trifles; and what is the good, if servants know their work, of always following them? It would kill me to do things as Aunt Sampson did. But I don't tell uncle so. I believe he thinks I'm half my morning in the kitchen. Well, if it makes him happy to think so, and makes Jones

happy for me to keep out, I don't see why I shouldn't please them both. Jones sends up capital dinners, and she brings me the books every week, and I pretend to go over them; but I never had a head for figures, as you know, Polly. Still, it doesn't matter. I daresay Jones is as honest as most people,—all servants would cheat if they only had a chance,—and if she and the tradesmen do make a little extra profit out of Uncle Sampson, why he's rich, and can very well spare the money."

Amanda leaned back yet more luxuriously on her lounge, played with the rings on her fingers,—Mr. Sampson had given her two or three of his late wife's,—and presently went on,—

"There's nothing like a little management. You never had much, Polly, dear; not in that way, at least; you were always so downright and plain-spoken; but nobody can say I didn't bear with you very well for your poor dear papa's sake. I knew my duty to him, child as I was, and I knew it to you. There are not many step-mammas who would get on as well as I did with a daughter only three years younger than themselves; and I know my duty to Uncle Sampson," continued Amanda, firmly; "and I am determined to make things as easy and pleasant to him as possible. That's one reason why I left the dear children behind. I felt the parting, I can assure you, Polly. People needn't think, because I'm so young and inexperienced, I haven't the feelings of a mother; but I knew my duty, and I did it. Their noise would have been too much for Uncle Sampson, and they might," said Amanda, looking on the ground with a little gentle confusion, "have interfered with —with—my future prospects. This place isn't like Highleigh, though it is only the east of London, and I daresay by-and-by I shall get Uncle Sampson to move to the west. Bayswater or Kensington is so much nicer every way. But east or west," continued Amanda, with emphasis, "it's *London*, and one isn't buried alive, and there's always chances for seeing people—and children—just at the first, when a gentleman may be thinking matters over—why, children might be rather a drawback—only just at the first, you know, Polly."

"You're thinking of marrying again, and you've hardly been a widow for a twelvemonth, Amanda," said Polly, severely; and, the next moment, she was angry with herself for her own anger. "Mandie's a fool, and can't help her nature," she thought, contemptuously. "Some fools are affectionate, though; but Mandie's head isn't the only weak point about her."

Mrs. Brooke took out her hem-stitched handkerchief and wiped her eyes.

"It's very unkind of you to talk like that, Polly. I'm sure no one can say but what I was as fond of your poor dear papa as if I had been of his own age, instead of five-and-twenty years younger. You know when he died my feelings were such that I was fit for nothing, but had to leave you to see to the funeral and everything else. If you'd taken it to heart as I did, you never could have done it. But at my age, one can't be expected not to think of settling again some time. I'm in no hurry, and I haven't seen any one yet —that is no one particular," continued Mrs. Brooke, with a pretty air of modest confusion.

"But I suppose you make sure that somebody will come?" said Polly, with a little sarcasm, which she found it impossible to repress, Amanda made so sure of getting a husband; "and fools do marry, somehow," thought Polly with some bitterness, as she remembered how this especial fool had once come between her and her father.

"Well," said Amanda, "I can't help it, Polly. It isn't my fault. I used to think that if I was shut up in a nunnery, with a wall twenty feet high, and a dreadful old dragon of an abbess, such as one reads of, some one would come climbing over. Now, nobody ever marries at Highleigh, but I never stirred from it; and yet, when your father came fishing to the village, he must needs fall in love with me the very first time he saw me. And Peggy and Patty are there still; and there they'll stay, old maids to the end of their days. And I often think you'll be an old maid yourself, Polly; but you needn't be jealous of me. It isn't my fault, you know. People can't help other people thinking them young, and attractive, and all that."

"I'm not jealous in the least, Mandie; and I think it's very likely I shall be an old maid; but I hope whoever you get will be a good father to the babies."

Mrs. Brooke thought it time to exercise some of the rites of hospitality. She rang the bell for cake and wine, which were brought; and then Polly asked if Madge, whom she had left in the hall, might go down to the kitchen and have a little refreshment, too. "I think that girl is always hungry, and it will be long past her usual tea-time before she gets home."

The sedate man-servant informed her that the young person was already in the kitchen, and almost looked as if he thought she had no business there. When he had left the room, Amanda, after dwelling a little further on her own affairs, was good enough to ask after Polly's. "I wonder you can still go on at Wurtemburg Street," she said, a little contemptuously. "I should have thought you would have got tired of playing upper servant, before this, and for only sixteen pounds a-year!"

"Mrs. Williams gave me a home when I didn't know where else to look for one," said Polly; "and she gives me quite as much as she can afford; and, now there is another opening before me, she is ready to let me take advantage of it at once. Miss Pembury, of Pembury Hall, in Hertfordshire, who has been staying with Mrs. Williams for some time, has asked me to be her companion and secretary. She is willing to give me fifty pounds a-year. I don't exactly know what the duties of a companion are, but I think I can earn my salary as secretary. I always had a turn for business and figures; yes, I think I can help her there, if she will let me."

"There's a chance for you!" said Amanda, rousing herself. "Now, if you were like other girls, you might pick up a rich husband. Pembury Hall—a county place, I shouldn't wonder. There's no knowing who you may meet; and you can dress very decently on fifty pounds a-year."

"I mean to dress on half of it, and decently, I hope," said Polly with a laugh. "As to picking up a husband, I don't suppose Miss Pembury takes me into her house with a view to assist me in that. She has delicate health, and means to live quietly; and I am just

to help her in the management of such affairs as she does not choose to leave entirely to her steward. I expect I shall have quite enough to do without troubling myself about a husband; and the gentlemen who visit at Pembury Hall are not very likely to think of me as a wife."

"You are always so odd, Polly," said Amanda, shaking her head with a little gentle reproach. "I've heard of girls that went out in that way doing very well indeed for themselves. Indeed, there were two of my friends who went out as governesses, entirely because they thought there was a better chance for them than by staying at home. And one of them, I know, made an excellent match."

"I pity her pupils," said Polly. "Well, Mandie, I'm not so fond of marrying as you are; so it isn't very likely I shall give the babies a brother-in-law so soon as you will give them a step-father. Now, I think I must be going. Good-by. Just ring the bell for my little maid."

Amanda kissed Polly again. She was always profuse in her caresses; and Polly, going downstairs, found Madge waiting for her in the hall. The girl looked sullen and gloomy, and when they were outside the house, Polly asked her what was amiss, but received no answer, or rather, just heard a few words so muttered that it was impossible to distinguish them. With the continuous roll of omnibuses, carts, and carriages in their ears, it was impossible to hope to hear plainly if Madge did not feel inclined to speak out; therefore Polly waited till they were in the churchyard, which, though a leading thoroughfare, is only such for foot-passengers, and, when they were once out of the stir and traffic of the street, she turned again to the girl,—

"Now, Madge, what's amiss? Wouldn't they give you a warm corner in the kitchen?"

"They gave me a deal more o' their jaw than I liked," said the girl, sullenly. "They're a regular stuck-up lot, they are! Begun starin' at my bonnet, an' askin' me if I didn't find my muff a tight fit; an' then that cook—she thinks she's somebody, she does—asked me what places I'd been in; an' when I told them this was my first service since I'd left the Union, she as good as told me to go out of her kitchen. 'She didn't want workhus company,' she said. O!" cried Madge, sitting down on a flat tombstone, and rocking herself violently to and fro, "what's the good of a girl tryin' her best to be decent and respectable when it's always flung agin her that she's been in the workhus? People couldn't turn their noses up at me more if I'd been in prison. The workhus! the workhus! I don't believe, try as hard as I will, I shall ever get quit of it."

Fortunately, no one was passing through the churchyard just then; and Polly, seating herself by Madge's side, tried to comfort the poor girl.

"You will leave the workhouse behind you yet, Madge, if you try; and you may do better than many o' those who think themselves so above you."

"Oh, that fat cook!" hissed Madge. "I'd more nor half a mind to heave a whole pile of plates at her; they was lyin' quite handy. To see her toss her head and look as if one was the dirt beneath her feet! Jane Wade did that in her first place," said Madge, "bekos

her missus aggravated her; an' she was sent back to the Union preshus sharp. If it hadn't been for the thoughts of you, miss, that cook would have had something pitched at her head, I know."

"I'm very glad you *did* think of me, Madge," said Polly; "and I wouldn't trouble myself about that cook, if I were you. She must be a very ignorant person. Come, leave off crying, and let's make haste to baby. What a comfort it is that we have been able to save her from the workhouse."

Madge wiped her eyes, and followed Polly; not, however, with the alacrity which she had shown when they started. She was evidently brooding over the wrongs she had sustained at the hands of Mr. Sampson's servants. Their insults had galled the girl bitterly. She was was just waking slowly to some sense of self-respect, some desire for better things, and now she was thrown back by the taunt of her origin. "Was pauperism to be as indelible as crime?" thought Polly. "If the girl had been reared in some home, however lowly, which she might have felt *was* a home, and which, whatever deficiencies and deprivations it had, would at least have been free from the workhouse taint, she might have had some chance. Will the poor ever die out of the land till we cease to rear our paupers in those wholesale hotbeds for them, the workhouses?"

"I think rich girls like Miss Pembury might find something better to do than to wail over their broken hearts while there are thousands of such poor girls as Madge in the kingdom," continued Polly to herself, as she glanced at her companion—sullen, scowling, and depressed—thrown down the ladder that led to better things just as she had tried to put her foot upon its lowest rung. Polly almost shuddered as she looked upon the girl, the certainty of coming evil seemed so completely to have obliterated the latent possibility of good.

CHAPTER XV.

UNDER THE RAILWAY ARCH.

Mrs. Smith and Jane were very pleased to see Polly. Baby had not been quite herself the last day or two; she had a little cold, Mrs. Smith thought. Mrs. Tosier had given it as her opinion that whooping-cough was setting in; Mrs. Lane, in the parlors, thought it might turn to croup; but in any case, Mrs. Smith was glad to see Miss Brooke, and ask her if she thought it would be as well to send for the doctor.

Baby was a little better just then. She smiled at Polly, and positively cooed at Madge when she took her in her arms. It was clear that she was an object of considerable interest, not only to Mrs. Smith, but to all the other dwellers in the house. Jane was as fond of her, she averred, as if she was her little sister; and Mrs. Smith, while expressing her anxiety on her account, declared, and Polly believed her, that she had got as fond of her as if she were one of her own. Farming out seemed to have provided baby, at once, with a set of relations. Mrs. Smith and Jane were, perhaps, not altogether perfect, and a decent cottage in the country would have

been better than the one room which had to answer every purpose of its three occupants; but the baby was better here than in the best ventilated, best ruled workhouse that was ever built. Say she grew up into another Susan, still Susan was many steps higher in the scale of humanity than Madge; and Polly resolved that, if life and health were spared, she would take care that baby, when she had to make her way in the world, should do so to better purpose than Susan. Madge sat and held the child, her face lighting up a little; then she suddenly bent and kissed it. "That's more nor it would ever have had in the workhus," she said, sharply. "I don't think the little 'uns there ever knows what kisses is."

"More shame for 'em that has the lookin' after the little 'uns," said Mrs. Smith, energetically. "How's a child to grow up into a Christian if it isn't treated as one? Kisses an' milk, that's what babies thrive on, I say. When they get bigger, they wants a bit o' meat, if you can afford to give it to them; an' they wants a slap or two to keep 'em from bein' unruly. I never was too fond of smackin' myself, unless they're downright owdacious; but there's no need to stint 'em in kisses while they're little—they come cheap enough, thank the Lord! if people's only got the heart to give 'em."

Polly put various questions about baby, suggested by her experience with Amanda's little ones. Mrs. Smith had applied the various remedies that Polly suggested—a hot bath, and even a mustard plaister. Polly considered a little; then she said, "I think it would be as well to have advice. I am sure Miss Pembury would say so. What do you think, Mrs. Smith, of calling in the doctor who attended Johnny Tozer?"

Mrs. Smith did not know how sufficiently to sing his praises. He had cured Johnny, and sent Jane something for her weak back, that had made her quite another creature. And he was pleasant to talk to, and affable, and considerate like, and had a way of heartening up people that did more good than even his physic. No, there could not possibly be a better doctor than Mr. Tynsdell.

"Would you go for him, Mrs. Smith?" said Polly. "I should like to hear what he says before I go back. It would be more satisfactory to Miss Pembury. No, stay; I shall go quicker than you; if you'll direct me I'll call myself, and leave word for him to come at once, if he's not at home."

Mrs. Smith gave Polly the doctor's address, and then she rose and went quickly off. She was not long in reaching his house, and was fortunate enough to find him at home. Mrs. Sims, who answered the door, showed her into his study at once; and Gordon Tynsdell's eyes brightened when they fell on her. It was not often that he saw so trim a figure and so pretty a face as Polly's in his surgery.

He was young and good-looking; but to Polly he was simply "the doctor." She stated her errand to him, just as she would have done it to Mr. Williams; and he told her he would come round at once. Polly walked back quickly—not so quickly, however, but that Gordon Tynsdell overtook her, and kept by her side, talking as he went, by way, perhaps, of making the road the shorter.

He thought Polly a very pretty girl, and she seemed a sensible one—every way she was pleasant to talk to. She, on her part,

liked being with him for the few minutes of their walk, and felt as if she should not have cared if it had been a little longer.

There was nothing very serious the matter with baby. Another bath and a powder or two, and Mr. Tynsdell had little fear but that she would be quite well. Then he had a word or two to say to Jane, and another to her mother, and, with a promise to send the medicine for baby as soon as he got home, he took his leave.

Polly had a few little matters to settle with Mrs. Smith; then, too, she rose to go. It had been dark some time, and, when she got to the door, she found it raining; she had neither umbrella nor waterproof with her, for the day had been fine and frosty when she started. She stood at the street-door irresolute; she had not gone out by Mrs. Smith's own private entrance, for fear of letting the cold air in on baby. She asked Jane, who had come up-stairs with her to let her out, whether her mother had an umbrella, and Jane ran down and brought up one. It was of cotton, with rents in every fold, and an obstinate determination not to be put up, only equaled by its disinclination to be put down. Jane didn't think that any of the lodgers had umbrellas; and as to cabs, there was not one nearer then Hackney Station. Polly peered out into the darkness once more. "It's not so *very* bad, Madge," she said. "I think we had better take Mrs. Smith's umbrella, and make the best of our way to the station before it is worse."

"I can take you under mine, if you will allow me," said Mr. Tynsdell; and Polly saw him coming down the stairs, Mrs. Tozer following with a lighted tallow candle flaring away in a brass candlestick. Mrs. Tozer had taken advantage of Mr. Tynsdell's visit to the house to consult him about her youngest hope, who was cutting his double teeth with distressing rapidity. Mr. Tynsdell had a stout silk umbrella in his hand. Polly thought it would protect her new hat much more efficiently than Mrs. Smith's old cotton one, and she said frankly,—"We are going as far as Hackney Station; if that is not taking you out of your way, I shall be very glad to do so."

Mr. Tynsdell assured her that it was not in the least out of his way, and Polly was too anxious on behalf of her new hat to ask herself how Hackney Station could be on his road to Victoria Park. She came under his umbrella very readily, and Madge followed with the ill-conditioned cotton one to herself.

A very rapid thaw had set in, and the rain, being as yet only a drizzling shower, had not force enough to wash the congealed mud away. The pavement was slippery and greasy. It was the most natural thing in the world for Mr. Tynsdell to offer his arm, and for Polly to take it; she had no missish shyness about her. It was pleasant to have a stout strong arm to lean upon at such a juncture; all the pleasanter, perhaps, because Polly had so seldom had any one to rely upon but herself. Presently the rain came on heavier than before; the drizzle had changed into a storm, and Polly found herself clinging closer to her companion as the great drops dashed in under the umbrella.

"I think we must stand up out of this," he said; "it won't last, but it's bad for you while it does. A few yards to the right, and we shall reach the railway arch."

Polly was glad, indeed, to obtain the shelter of the arch; for the

rain increased in violence, and kept on when they were there—a steady down-pour that promised to last some time.

"You *can't* go through it," said Gordon Tynsdell; "there is nothing for it but waiting."

"Only I'm keeping you," said Polly, "and baby may be wanting her medicine."

"Baby will take no hurt for the next hour or two," said the doctor. "She's a lucky little damsel to have such a warm friend as yourself."

"I hope she will prove lucky. Her little life has had a strange beginning," said Polly; and then she told him the story of baby's rescue, and Miss Pembury's semi-adoption of the child. Polly found herself talking frankly to him as if she had known him half her lifetime; but still he was only the doctor, and, as such, a person with whom one ought to feel at home at once. Besides, Polly was not given to fancy that every man who paid her a little courtesy and kindness must necessarily be in love with her: and Gordon Tynsdell's frank, cordial manner was devoid of anything that approached flirtation. For the present, at least, they were only two young people into whose outer lives little of brightness entered but what they created for themselves; it might be "the time of roses" for both of them, but there were very few roses growing for them to pluck. The daily existence of each had been, for years, but especially with Polly, as sober, as prosaic, and as earnest as if they were well on in middle life. Still, Gordon Tynsdell thought Polly as pretty and bright a girl as any he had ever seen; and she, on her part, considered him very pleasant, very sensible, and, above all, thoroughly good-natured.

"I have heard of Miss Pembury," he said, presently. "Miss Pembury of the Hall, Hertfordshire."

"Yes, the same. I am going to stay with her as useful companion, secretary, etc.," said Polly.

So pretty and bright as she was, this young lady had to work for her living just like himself; but Gordon thought he might have guessed as much from her perfect self-reliance. "I have never been in Hertfordshire," he said, "but I think you will find that part of it fairly pretty."

He was interrupted by Polly. "Who is that Madge is talking to?" she said.

Wet, dripping, shrinking from the rain and the wind, a woman—or rather a girl, for the slight figure, round which the poor, soddened rags clung so closely, and the face, which looked wanly out from the dark hair and the misshapen bonnet, were those of a girl in her teens, though there was a baby at her breast—came under the arch, and was speaking to Madge, who evidently recognized her. The child was a poor little creature. Polly shuddered as the light fell on its face. Madge and the girl seemed to have a great deal to say to each other, but they said it listlessly, wearily; there was none of the vapid interchange of words that there generally is between two girls who had not seen each other for some time; and yet these two were evidently friendly. The girl who had the baby looked starved and pinched with misery; there was a sullen, hopeless torpidity about her, worse than anything that Polly had ever

seen in Madge. It was as if she accepted suffering, and it might be sin—for there was a hard, bold, defiant look about her, into which Madge had not yet grown—as part of the condition of things to which she was born.

The baby cried—a weak, pitiful cry—its feeble plaint against the long suffering of its little life; and Polly instinctively stepped forward. "I don't think that child's well. How could you bring it out, such a night as this?"

"It doesn't matter; it's been like this ever since it was born, an' it'll never be different. It doesn't come of the right sort for thrivin'," said the girl, with a laugh that was bold in spite of its feebleness.

"Have you far to go?" asked Polly, arranging the poor coverings a little more carefully around the child. It made her heart ache to look on the little sharp face, wizened, and pinched, and aged, and yet—that was the most horrible thing of all—with a certain vitality in it that made you feel this child would live—would live, perhaps, to be an idiot or a cripple, or grow into such perverted, stunted maturity as its mother possessed: but it would *live* as thousands like it live, of whom one could only say that, next to having never known life, death would be the best thing for them. Diseased, maimed, stunted, and dwarfed in soul and body, still it was to know the curse of life, and *be* a curse, itself!

"She's goin' back to the Union with it," said Madge, "to morrow; to the one she belongs to. We come from the same. She'll sleep in the casual near here to-night. It's too far to her own place."

She spoke as if she and her friend had a right of property in the Union; and as if it were the most matter-of-course thing to return to it.

"It's a pity she's going back there," said Polly, sorrowfully.

"What else is one to do?" said Madge, bitterly. "Let one try and keep out an' be respectable, other folk won't let one. I've heard say, them that's born in the Union is safe to go back there to die, an' it seems like it. One can't get on, no how; folks won't let one."

"Try, Madge, and I'll help you," said Polly.

"Ay, but you ain't every one; and there's not a many like you."

Mr. Tynsdell now interposed. "I don't think it's raining so much now," he said, not sorry to take Polly from the girl with her nameless child. He felt already sufficient interest in her to be jealous of the contamination of such a presence. Polly looked regretfully at the little one and its mother.

"If one could only do something," she said; and turned away, with the tears in her eyes at her own helplessness.

"The case is chronic," said Gordon Tynsdell; "past your help or my cure; and there are thousands such. Still for your sake——"

For the sake of the pure, tender, pitying womanhood that looked out of those sorrowful eyes, he turned back and spoke gently to the girl, to whom womanhood had been only given to be a soiled and degraded thing. "Come to my house," and he gave her his card. "I'll see if I can do anything for your child, and you shall have a supper, and the means of getting a better lodging than in the casual ward."

Then he drew Polly's hand on his arm again. This little incident, and his kindness to the workhouse waif, had made the pleasant

acquaintance of a moment ripen at once into friendship. They went out from under the arch, and Madge followed them into the chill, wet air of that wintry night, which, for two of them, had begun a new life.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT PEMBURY HALL.

In the drawing-room of the Hall at Radley, Mrs. Danvers was seated, awaiting her niece, three days after Polly had paid her visit to Amanda. Mrs. Danvers was now sixty-five, but with a certain amount of good looks still, for she had plenty of gray hair, very nicely arranged, and judiciously supplemented by art. Her cap did her milliner credit, and her black silk fell in rich, lustrous folds around her figure, which, if rather stout, was still good. She had an imposing presence, although scarcely of the middle height; and altogether, to judge by appearances, it would have been difficult to find a more unexceptionable chaperon for a young lady in Miss Pembury's position.

Mrs. Danvers had installed herself in that position as a matter of course when Millicent was left an orphan. Her two guardians were extremely glad when Mrs. Danvers came forward and relieved them of the personal charge of the young lady. And whatever it might be for Millicent, there was no doubt that Mrs. Danvers's residence at the Hall was a very good thing for herself. She had had three husbands; but, as the first had run through his property in his lifetime, and the second had not saved very much from his salary as an *employé* in the Woods and Forests, and the third had had little but an annuity which died with him, Mrs. Danvers, who had had but a small fortune of her own, would have found it difficult to regulate her mode of life in accordance with her inclinations, if it had not been for the opportunity thus afforded her of sharing the home of her niece.

Mrs. Danvers was sitting by the fire in the warmest corner of the room, and in the easiest chair it held. Her pet dog was at her feet. If Mrs. Danvers cared for anything in this world, it was for that dog; but her affections, at the best, were lukewarm. She had a little table at her right hand, with her newspaper, her novel, her knitting, and her glasses on it. She was comfortable—thoroughly comfortable—and looked so. If the house, and all within it, had been her own, Mrs. Danvers could not have more fully appropriated the good things it contained than she did now.

But her meditations were not quite such pleasant ones as they usually were. She was a little disquieted by the fact that Millicent meant to bring a "companion" home with her. Mrs. Danvers had held undivided rule over the household until now, and the "companion" might either seek to share that rule, or incite Millicent to possess herself of it wholly.

"I hope she will know her place," thought Mrs. Danvers, "and keep to it; but people whose position is undefined are never pleasant in a house. I wonder what Millicent wanted with her? Hadn't she me for a companion?—and as to a secretary, considering how very few letters she has to write, the place will be a sinecure."

Presently Mrs. Danvers looked at the clock on the mantel-piece, with a little impatience. "They will be late for lunch, and the cutlets will be as dry as chips; they've either missed the train, or gone the longest way round. If the latter is the case, it's very thoughtless of Millicent; she knows how much I like regularity."

Meanwhile, Millicent was being borne along, in her own carriage, from the station, with Pauline Brooke by her side. It was as lovely a day as could well be in winter—bright, clear, and crisp; and even Millicent's spirits rose a little, and Polly's cheeks flushed, and her face brightened into positive beauty. "This is a very pretty country," she said. "I had no idea there was anything so pretty so near Essex. Only to think of it! We have been little more than an hour leaving the smoke, and the dust, and the whirl, and the worry behind."

"I doubt if we have left the worry," said Miss Pembury, with a faint smile. "We shall find that wherever we go; but Aunt Danvers takes a great deal of that off me. I have certainly never had many cares in my household, as yet."

Polly was hardly attending to her. She was looking eagerly at every fresh object that caught her eyes. Each thatched cottage, each twisted trunk of the roadside trees,—the homesteads standing with their backgrounds of farm buildings and haystacks, the cattle nibbling the short, frozen grass, or looking with mild eyes at the carriage as it was carried past them,—struck on her with a new delight. It is only born Londoners who thoroughly enjoy the country, and Millicent looked at her with a little amused wonder.

"If you like the drive so much, we will take the furthest way round," she said, "and that will bring us through Radley. I should have taken the shorter way myself, but you may as well see a little of the village,—not that there is much in it to see," said Mrs. Pembury, languidly.

Radley was but a small place. There was the butcher's, the baker's, and the general shop, the blacksmith's, and a few laborers' cottages. But Miss Pembury's carriage was known, and the children stopped and courtesied as she passed, and the women looked with a respectful curiosity after it, and the doctor, driving past, raised his hat to the occupant of the carriage, while even the blacksmith paused in the midst of shoeing a horse, and made some remark—evidently upon Miss Pembury's return.

"You are like a little queen coming back to your kingdom," said Polly, with a smile; "and I think all your subjects are very glad to see you amongst them again."

"I don't think they have seen very much of me, however," said Miss Pembury. "Aunt Danvers never wished that I should go very much amongst them. I taught in the Sunday School, and, of course, there were blankets and petticoats for the poor at Christmas, and soup every week during the winter; but still I don't know so much of my people as I ought. I am sure you will say so," added the heiress, with a faint smile. Since she had known Polly, smiles—only wintry ones, it is true, but still smiles—had come to Millicent Pembury's lips. "But then," she continued, "you always take life so much in earnest."

"Because I have never been able to make anything else of it,"

said Polly. "There has been very little play time for me, remember."

They were now at the gate of the lodge, and the woman who kept it came forward to open it, and stood courtesying to her young mistress. Miss Pembury bent forward graciously, then drew herself back, with a scarlet flush on her cheek, as she caught sight of a girl, some years younger than herself, standing near the doorway of the lodge, with a baby in her arms. The woman at the lodge seemed to perceive the look, for she turned back on the girl, as if to reprove her for coming forward. It all passed in a minute, but Polly's curiosity was aroused. "That was a pretty girl with the child," she said, "who is she?"

"Her child is her disgrace," said Millicent Pembury, slowly. "If Aunt Danvers knew that Mrs. Chubb allowed her to enter the lodge, she would be very angry."

"She is very young—and so pretty," said Polly, as if the culprit's beauty ought to be considered a redeeming point in her favor.

"The greater the pity," said Millicent; but there was no pity in the tone in which she said it.

So far apart, those two girls! The one unworthy even to enter the gates of the other—of that other, who might have asked herself whether it would have been impossible for her to have sinned as this her outcast sister had sinned, if, like her, she had grown up in a home where moral and physical purity were alike impossible. That question did cross Polly's audacious mind, for the pretty child-like face of the sinner at the gates still haunted it; but there was no further time to indulge such thoughts, for they were now within sight of the Hall, and Polly looked with a little curiosity at her new home.

A handsome, comfortable place, of the time of the Charleses, with nothing especially quaint or picturesque about it, standing pleasantly in the center of a well-wooded, though not very large park, and looking over some of the prettiest country in Hertfordshire. The large flagged hall was lit by a great fire of logs, which flashed ruddily on the pictures around, and on the old carved oaken settles and tables. Two elderly men-servants were at the door to receive their young mistress, and to usher her into the drawing-room, where Aunt Danvers slowly rose, and advanced a step or two to welcome her.

The two ladies kissed—politely. Polly saw clearly, what she had pretty well divined, from Millicent's sketch of her aunt, that there was no great warmth of affection between them. Then Mrs. Danvers slightly bent her head when Polly was introduced to her, but made no further sign of welcome. She had resolved that if Polly did not know her place, it should not be through any fault of hers.

"Rutt, send one of the housemaids to show Miss Brooke to her room," said Mrs. Danvers. "Milly, don't be long undressing, or lunch will be spoiled; or shall Rutt take your wraps for you?"

Rutt was Millicent's own maid—ostensibly; that is to say, Miss Pembury had the privilege of paying her; but Mrs. Danvers monopolized the greater part of her time and attentions, just as she

monopolized the greater part of the other luxuries or benefits which her niece's fortune enabled her to obtain. If a queen, Millicent had decidedly been hitherto a *reine fainéante;* but the passive gentleness of her character had made it very easy for her to accept the position. She rose now. "I will go to my room, aunt, and we will be down to lunch in a few minutes; and, Rutt, you can show Miss Brooke to her room yourself and then come to me."

"She'll spoil that girl," said Mrs. Danvers, nestling down into her cushions; "and she's a girl who'll presume upon being spoiled. Pert, I'm sure, by the look of her, and much too good-looking for the place. She'll presume on her good looks,—girls of that class always do,—and think they've a right to carry everything before them."

Polly was delighted with her room when she reached it. Mrs. Williams, when Sarah Pembury, had occupied it, and it had, therefore, seemed to Mrs. Danvers the fittest to assign to "the new companion." The furniture was of the date of the last century, and the carpet and the chintz curtains were faded; but it was large, and the appointments, if old and dim, were still plentiful and good. There were two or three pictures—family portraits, put here to be out of the way; and old china, which was not thought good enough for any other room. But the pictures and china were luxuries to Polly, and the windows looked over the park, and ivy crept round them—it was altogether so different from the bare, spare meanness of the chamber she had shared with the little Williamses in Wurtemburg Street. The large swing-glass, in which Polly's face shone so freshly, was such a pleasant change from the ten-inch plate in a cheap mahogany frame, which hung against the wall of her former room, and which always caricatured any one who looked in it. The spider-legged table against one of the windows, on which she placed her work-box and writing materials, at once—the cushioned arm-chair she drew up to it,—the couch at the foot of the bed,—all were unknown luxuries to Polly, who had never had such a room before—never dreamed of it, indeed. Her own home had been as scanty in its appointments as the one in Wurtemburg Street; and the plenty of household plenishing, the luxury of spare chairs and tables, the superfluity of ornaments and china which she saw around her, were things wholly new to her experience.

There was no fire in the room. Mrs. Danvers had not ordered it for "the new companion," thinking it might spoil her. She had never spoiled Sarah Williams, her own relation, in that way, and she did not mean to spoil Miss Brooke. But Polly's blood was tingling with the excitement of the new world around her, and the pleasure of having such a roomy, well-lined nest for herself, and she moved briskly about, unlocked her box, and put her possessions here and there, till she had time for more orderly arrangements; and then paid such attention to her toilet as she thought would make her presentable at lunch.

She had just finished, when Millicent knocked at her door; and, in answer to Polly's "Come in!" entered, and looked around her.

"I hope you like your room," she said. "But I'm afraid you're cold. Aunt must have forgotten to order the fire."

"I never dreamed of such a luxury as a fire in my bed-room,"

said Polly, with a laugh. "You forget the surroundings I have been used to."

"But you must be perished," said Millicent, shivering. "I must speak about it. But come to lunch now. There is nothing Aunt Danvers likes worse than having any meal a moment behind its time."

But they were five minutes behind when they entered the dining-room, as Mrs. Danvers let them know. "There is nothing," she said, as she took her place at the table, "that so interferes with one's comfort, as irregularity at meals. Poor Mr. Greville used to say a dinner kept was a dinner spoiled. When you know us better, Miss Brooke, you will see the value of such punctuality."

"I hope I shall know it and practice it too," said Polly. "But to-day, even if I had been ready in time, which I was not, I could not have found my way downstairs unless Miss Pembury had kindly come to show me the way."

"I think you have a bell," said Mrs. Danvers stiffly; "and I have desired the second housemaid to answer it. She would have directed you how to find the dining-room."

Polly felt that she had offended, but was not quite clear how. She ate her cutlet with a good appetite, however, and thought that life at the Hall must be a much pleasanter thing than life in Wurtemburg Street, if the meals were always as well served as this one. Mrs. Danvers recommended her niece to take tomato sauce. "Poor Mr. Landon was so partial to it. He said it always put him in mind of that book of Dickens's—was it 'Nickleby' or 'Pickwick?' —I think it was Dickens; or was it Thackeray?" continued Mrs. Danvers, to whom one author was as good or as bad as another.

"'Pickwick,'" said Polly, taking the sauce herself, thus recommended.

"Thank you, Miss Brooke," with a slight bend of the head; "but the name was not material. Mr. Langdon thought the sauce so good for those troubled with dyspepsia; he was a martyr to it himself—singularly so, for such a young man."

Mrs. Danvers was faithful, with laudable impartiality, to the memory of her three husbands. Sometimes she favored her friends with reminiscences of the first, or tender anecdotes of the second, of loving allusions to the third. It was believed that Mr. Danvers himself had never been allowed to forget that each of his predecessors still held a place, equal to his own, in her affections; but he was now enshrined in her memory by their side, and it is to be hoped his shade was better satisfied with his widow's constancy than the living man had always been with his wife's.

Mrs. Danvers ate slowly and deliberately. Lunch, to her, held the second place amongst the events of the day. The greatest was dinner. But at last, when Polly had begun to think that it was paying too dear a price for any meal to sit so long over it as Miss Pembury and she had to do out of courtesy to Mrs. Danvers, that lady rose, and slowly led the way to the drawing-room.

"The fire flushes one so," she said, as, having settled herself in her cushions, she took a hand screen from the mantelpiece. But it was not the fire that so regularly, after lunch and dinner, flushed Mrs. Danvers's face. "And now, Milly dear, I have all sorts of

things to talk over with you, and I daresay Miss Brooke will be glad of an hour or two in her own room."

"Quite so," said Polly, "as I have all my unpacking to do."

"But there is no fire," said Millicent.

"I don't think Miss Brooke will find it cold. Sarah Williams used to say that was the warmest room in the house. *She* never wanted a fire," said Mrs. Danvers.

"I shall not feel the cold in the least," said Polly; and left the room at once, feeling not only that Mrs. Danvers wanted her out of the room, but that she was not disposed to make her stay in the house too comfortable.

"Teaching children is tiring," said Polly to herself, "especially when one has so much to do with them as I had with the little Williamses; but a governess knows what is expected of her, and it seems to me that a companion never does. I wonder how I am to tell when I am in the way, and ought to get out of it? I suppose I shall find out in time; and I shall have something to put up with from that old lady, I see. However, one can't expect to earn fifty pounds a-year for doing nothing."

"You'll spoil that girl," said Mrs. Danvers, when Polly had closed the door behind her. "She would never have expected a fire if you had not put it into her head; and you might have left her to find her own way down, or ring for a servant, instead of bringing her yourself. Nothing ruins people of that class so much as putting them out of their place. I wish you could have heard dear Mr. Greville on that subject. And why *did* you bring her?"

"Because I couldn't go on living here alone," said Millicent, with flushed cheeks and downcast eyes; "because I must have somebody about me to whom I can turn to help me out of myself,—somebody strong, helpful, energetic, who will not let me brood and brood over my own misery."

"Which I have always thought it a very indelicate thing indeed of you to do, Millicent," said her aunt, with some severity. "If you would only rouse yourself! If you young people did but know what real troubles are!"

"I know my own, aunt," said Millicent; "and I think Pauline Brooke will help me to bear them better than I have done. I mean to try what we can do together."

"All I have to say is, don't spoil her," repeated Mrs. Danvers, energetically. "And I hope you will give her to understand that she will be expected to make herself of some use. I wonder if she writes a good hand? She might help me with my correspondence —the business part of it, you know. You see, what with the Grevilles, and the Landons, and all poor Mr. Danvers's relations, I have no time really for the begging-letters, and the answers to invitations, and that kind of thing."

"That kind of thing is precisely what Miss Brooke is going to do for *me*," said Millicent; "the begging-letters especially."

"I hope you are not going in for philanthropy, Millicent. Mr. Danvers used to say the greatest bores in society, and the people who neglected their own families the most, were the professed philanthropists; and it's an odd, unladylike thing for a young wom-

an to take up,—it leads them to know so much, and to do so much, which young women ought to let alone altogether."

"I don't know how that may be, aunt," said Millicent; "but I want to make a better thing of my life than I have yet done. If I don't," she added, almost desperately, "God knows how I shall bear it!"

"You *must* bear it, Millicent; and it is not right to talk in that strange and excited manner. I don't think you're improved by your visit to London. Miss Brooke strikes me as an odd young person, and she seems to have obtained too much influence over you. Bear your life! Why, if you marry you will have some one to help you bear it. And now, Millicent, this brings me to what I had to say to you. A girl like you must marry—ought to marry; it's a duty you owe to society, to yourself, to your friends; and if Mr. Horace Gordon—"

"*Don't!*" cried the girl, putting up her hand as if to ward off a blow. "Aunt, why do you bring up his name?"

"Because you must learn to hear it without showing that it affects you," said Mrs. Danvers. "It may seem unfeeling, Millicent; but I cannot encourage you in this puerile nonsense. The common sense of the matter is, that you can't throw your life away because Mr. Gordon has thrown away his. You must marry, and marry suitably. He has kept others off; but now that it is generally known that all is at an end between you, there will be a difference. Mr. Tilburne, of the Roydons, was,—well, I suppose I may say, sounding me on the subject. I told him everything was at an end—*quite* at an end, between you and Mr. Horace Gordon, and he intimated, with sufficient plainness, what his own wishes were—in fact, Millicent, it rests with you to become Mrs. Tilburne, of the Roydons, and I really don't see that you could do better."

"If you please, aunt, we won't talk about this at all. I have no wish to marry, and I cannot see the necessity of my doing so," said Millicent, with a little irritation.

"Don't lose your temper, my dear—there is nothing so unladylike; and in your case, Millicent, to get into a habit of irritability would be so exceedingly foolish. People would say you had had a disappointment, and were soured in consequence, and that would injure your prospects so very much. You must never let it seem as if Mr. Gordon's conduct had affected you in the least. Of course, it is slightly awkward that he should have behaved so badly; and the best thing for you will be a successful *good* marriage. Now, Mr. Tilburne—"

"If you please, aunt, don't bring up his name again."

"Very well, my dear; but I asked him to drop in to lunch to-morrow, and you must be civil in your own house, remember."

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. TILBURNE'S OFFICE.

THE good luncheon, of which Polly had so approved, was followed by a still better dinner, and Polly's bed was of a softness and warmth to which she was wholly unaccustomed. Millicent, too,

had given directions that there should be a fire kept in her room; and, the servants seeing that their young mistress, who so rarely interfered in matters of household detail, took sufficient interest in Miss Brooke to do so, and being further propitiated by Polly's pleasant face and pleasant manner, she was not likely to suffer from any want of attention on their part. Mrs. Danvers was slightly disagreeable, but she went to sleep after dinner; and then there was the box from Mudie's to look over, and two or three new magazines, and every chair in the warm, luxurious drawing-room was a nest of softness, and all seemed so luxurious and harmonious, that Polly found the evening fly on wings. Then the breakfast, the next morning, was a perfect banquet compared to the Wurtemburg Street meals; and, after breakfast, Millicent took her into the library, where a great wood-fire was burning, that threw a warm light over the brown calf-bindings of the older books, and the dark mahogany furniture, and the pictures, and the busts of departed worthies.

Life at the Hall seemed as pleasant to Polly as if it were in Fairyland. It seemed as if she could forget all the vulgar, sordid cares and anxieties with which she had been so familiar from her childhood. Wurtemburg Street, and the back parlor behind the chemist's shop, where her father had sat, and read, and dreamed the hours away, were now as if they belonged to another world. The troubles with milkmen and butchers; with Amanda's helplessness and her many babies: with her father's dreamy abstractedness from the things of this world,—all these, and so many other troubles of the kind that had beset her from her earliest recollection, were now as if they had never been. Miss Pembury, herself, too, was so gracious and pleasant; the slight reserve and hauteur which had frosted her over before the advent of the baby in Wurtemburg Street had quite gone, and she was ready to tell Millicent stories of the old portraits, and to talk with her about the books, both old and new, as frankly and as freely as if they both stood on the same standpoint, instead of having what would have seemed, a short time back, the immeasurable gulf of her wealth and social position between them.

They were just two girls—nothing more; and the weaker and less happy one was glad to have found a stronger and more helpful nature than her own to lean upon.

Mrs. Danvers left them to themselves for the morning. She had her daily round of duties to perform, and she certainly performed them well. She visited the kitchen daily. As she always said, it was a great effort; but the result achieved was worth it. She had a long conference with the cook in that functionary's own region, and the result was the due succession of the admirable meals to which Polly had done such justice. Then the upper housemaid and the butler had their turn. Mrs. Danvers had a talent for domestic administration, and always chose her niece's servants wisely. Then, when these labors were over, she returned to her own especial corner in the drawing-room, and read the paper, or wrote to her numerous correspondents. She was on excellent terms with the principal members of each of her deceased husbands' families. Indeed, Mrs. Danvers, throughout life, had made it a rule to "keep up" with anybody who might, by any possibility, be useful, and

never to quarrel with any one. And these various duties sufficed her this morning till luncheon was drawing nigh, and Mr. Tilburne, of the Roydons, made his appearance.

Polly made his acquaintance at lunch, and thought him a good-looking young man, with nothing very particular about him. He was just an average specimen of his class, but the class altogether was new to Polly. He had been educated at Eton, and knew nothing of the history of his own country, very little of the spelling of its language, and still less of its syntax. He was tolerably proficient in field sports, and classed poachers and vermin together, inasmuch as both interfered with his favorite pursuit. He was as good tempered as most men, as long as he had his own way; and he was gentlemanly in his manners, and, on the whole, promised to develop into an average Justice of the Peace and Member of Parliament. He was very attentive to Miss Pembury, but not obtrusively so; and the purpose of his coming was as clear to Polly as if she had overheard the admonitions with which Mrs. Danvers had favored her niece respecting him.

"If she could get to like him, and if he is worth her liking, it would be a very good thing for her," thought Polly; "but, from what I have seen of Miss Pembury, I very much doubt whether she will ever again like any one in this world well enough to marry him."

Millicent was civil to her guest, as her aunt had told her she should be; she showed nothing worse than polite indifference to his attentions, and Aunt Danvers was satisfied, and Mr. Tilburne felt content to bide his time—intending, however, that such biding should not be long,

So a fortnight went on, during which Mr. Tilburne's visits were almost daily, and his attentions as unobtrusive, but as unremitting, as at first. Miss Pembury neither encouraged nor rebuffed them. She seemed almost passive; and Mrs. Danvers, who had always had her way in everything that concerned her niece, flattered herself she should have her way also in her marriage. For many reasons, Mrs. Danvers wished to bring this about. Mr. Tilburne had a "place" of his own; and would, naturally, rather take his wife to his own house than reside in hers. But the hall would do admirably for a dower-house for Millicent. In contemplating a marriage, it was only natural that Mrs. Danvers should think of widowhood. But while awaiting the possible return of its present occupant, the Hall would require keeping in order, and Mrs. Danvers meant to do this for her niece. To let it, either furnished or unfurnished, would be a desecration of the family residence that no Pembury could consent to.

And besides all this, Mrs. Danvers honestly believed that the only thing her niece could do with her life was to spend it in marriage—that was the end and aim of a woman's existence. A single woman was a poor, imperfect creature—a living failure—a thing to be looked upon with a pity that was very nigh contempt. She considered that she was only fulfilling her duty in urging Millicent to marry, and Mrs. Danvers had a great idea of doing her duty. Duty was so safe, respectable, and proper, as far as this world went, and a good investment for the next.

At the end of the fortnight, Mr. Tilburne spoke. Millicent had expected and dreaded this proposal, and yet, when it came, was cowardly enough to feel some surprise. It had come so soon upon her! Why could he not have given her a little longer? As far as she gave any answer at all that was the gist of her answer, and Mr. Tilburne would not consider it as a negative. He told her he was content to wait; and he told Mrs. Danvers, afterward, as much. "Perhaps I have been a little too hasty," he said; "I ought to have given her a little more time after that wretched affair of Gordon's; but it will be only a question of time," he added, with a touch of very natural complacency. He was not quite such an egotist as Mr. Tomlyn, or, at least, he had the grace to hide his egotism better; but he was somewhat of his opinion, that in marriage it was the woman who gained, and the man who gave everything.

Mrs. Danvers did not scold Millicent for not giving a more decided answer. On the contrary, she appeared to assume that Millicent had given all but an acceptance, and congratulated her on her good sense, giving her a kiss, that was almost affectionate, as a sign of approval. In vain Millicent urged that Mr. Tilburne ought to look upon himself as a rejected suitor. Mrs. Danvers would hear of nothing of the kind. She had told him he had come too soon,—well, he would come later; he would wait any time in reason. He was not exacting or unreasonable, and could make allowances; "but, of course, Millicent, when a gentleman is told to wait, he expects that if he *does* wait he will ultimately obtain that which he has waited for," said Mrs. Danvers, with that dignified air of judicial severity which she was apt to assume when she wished to be unusually impressive.

"I never told him he would have *me* for the waiting," cried Millicent. "If he told you so, he must have misunderstood me altogether, aunt. If I could only be let alone! only left to rest in peace!—or, at any rate, for a few years."

"A few years make a great difference to a woman," said Mrs. Danvers," and you are nearly twenty-two as it is, Millicent. Don't cry. What a pity it is you cannot keep your feelings under proper control. Let me ring for Rutt to give you some sal volatile."

"I am not crying, aunt; and there is no occasion to trouble Rutt," said Millicent, who was not quite so calm as she would have liked her aunt to believe.

"We won't say anything more about it at present," said Mrs. Danvers, diplomatically. "Think it over by yourself, Millicent. I am sure, when you do so, your good sense will show you that I am in the right." Then Mrs. Danvers leaned back in her chair, and folding her hands placidly on her ample chest, closed her eyes; and Millicent knew that it would be useless to say anything further. Whenever Mrs. Danvers resigned herself to repose, her niece knew that she declined all further controversy, and considered that she had the best of whatever argument had been sustained.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WHAT ELSE SHALL I DO?"

MILLICENT was ruffled and disturbed by her conversation with her aunt, and went to Polly's room, thinking to recover her composure by talking matters over with her. But she forgot, till she arrived there, that Polly had been dispatched on an errand to the village by Mrs. Danvers, and, when the fact occurred to her recollection, she resolved to sit down and wait there till her return.

Mrs. Danvers had asked Polly to call at the school with a message from her to the mistress. Mrs. Danvers patronized the school, and showed a dignified graciousness to its mistress. She made a point of visiting it at least once a month, and she was in the habit of calling at one or other of the cottages occasionally. Millicent, before her illness, had sometimes accompanied her on these visits; but, except for a drive or two, she had not yet, since her return, gone beyond her gates. Mrs. Danvers had had a slight cold, and had asked Polly to look in at the school, and acquaint the mistress with the fact, and inquire as to the progress of some needle-work which the elder girls of the school had in hand for "the House." Then she was to take a pot of black-currant jelly to an old woman who was one of Mrs. Danvers's favorites, and inquire after the rheumatism of an old man who was another. Mrs. Danvers always did "her duty" conscientiously and severely by her poorer neighbors; and, if frowning on all delinquents, and visiting all transgressions with unsparing judgment, would have made Radley a model village, it would have been one.

Millicent had, therefore, a little time to think over her aunt's advice, and call her good sense to her aid; and, when she did think it over, was it so very bad, after all? She did not love this man who had asked her to be his wife; and all the love that it had ever been in her to give, all the love that it would ever be hers to know, had been poured forth upon Horace Gordon. But what was there for a woman, even if that woman was an heiress, but marriage? That was the creed in which Millicent had been brought up by her aunt, and the creed of so many girls as good and as well born as herself. Failing marriage, a woman had missed the purpose of her life. Would it not be better for her to take Mr. Tilburne, of the Roydons, make the best of such an imperfect union as theirs would be, and have the status and the privileges of a married woman, than to sink into that poor contemptible nonentity, an old maid—an old maid, not knowing what to do with her riches or her life?

"I'll ask Pauline about it," said Millicent. She had not yet relaxed sufficiently from the little stateliness of reserve which was habitual to her to call her new friend by that abbreviation of her name which, to those who knew Miss Pauline Brooke best, seemed so delightfully characteristic of her. But she had dropped the Miss Brooke, and intimated that Miss Pembury might be dispensed with, which permission Polly, having due regard to Mrs. Danvers's feelings, had declined to act upon unless they were quite alone.

"How pretty she has made this room look," she thought, as she looked around her. "I should never have thought a new arrangement of these old things would have made such a different appearance."

Indeed, Polly had made herself a very cozy nest in the old-fashioned chamber assigned to her. There were her own small possessions about, a few flowers from the amply filled greenhouses; and the formal spindle-backed chairs and spider-legged tables had been placed in positions in which they found it impossible to preserve their character for stiffness and angularity. And, thanks to Millicent, there was that crowning feminine luxury, a bedroom fire constantly maintained; and the fire now, as she bent over it, threw out jets of flame, and lit the dark furniture, the chintz curtains, and Polly's face, as she stood in the doorway.

But there was a cloud on Polly's face, which neither her bright, pretty room nor Millicent's eager look, as she turned toward her, could dispel.

"I have made myself at home," said the latter, with one of those smiles that of late she had bestowed only on Polly. "I have been waiting here for you, because I wanted very much to see you. I have been vexed, worried," she continued, with a shade of irritation; "and I suppose you can guess what it is about."

Polly shook her head in the negative. She had thrown off her outdoor wrappings while Millicent had been speaking, and taken a low chair opposite Miss Pembury.

"I don't know," she said, "what you can have to vex you here. Everything in this house goes on with such smoothness, life seems to roll on velvet. One would think cares and troubles were not in existence so long as one only kept within the gates."

If Millicent had been less engrossed by her own annoyance, she might have seen that *without* "the gates" Polly had found something that disquieted her; but, with that unconscious selfishness which such a training as Mrs. Danvers's is sure to develop, even in the most amiable nature, she saw nothing of the kind, but went on, "It is about Mr. Tilburne; he has been here so much of late, and Aunt Danvers has been speaking to me about him. I suppose you can, at least, guess what she had to say, and what he said to me before he left this morning?"

"Yes; it has been easy to read Mr. Tilburne's errand," said Polly; "but I don't know whether I am to congratulate you on having allowed it to be a successful one?"

"No. I thought I had made myself understood by him; but it seems not. I told him he was abrupt, premature; and he appears to have taken that as an encouragement instead of the opposite. And Aunt Danvers thinks so too; and, oh! Pauline," she added, with a heavy sigh, "I suppose I shall have to give in to them both. One must marry sooner or later, and it may as well be Mr. Tilburne, of the Roydons, as any one else."

"I never could see that marriage was such a universal necessity," said Polly. "I think a woman may get through life very well without it. But if you really like Mr. Tilburne," she added, doubtfully, for there was nothing in Millicent's manner to warrant such a supposition, "if you like him—or love him, rather, for I don't think

mere liking is enough to marry upon—why, I hope, with all my heart, you will be happy."

"And suppose there is no love and but little liking?" said Millicent, slowly. Then, as if with a sudden desperation, she said, rapidly, and almost vehemently,—"It is no longer *possible* for me to love either Mr. Tilburne or any man but that one whom you say, and whom my better feeling teaches me I ought never to look upon again. I believe I shall, in time, like Mr. Tilburne as well as I can ever like any one. I suppose we shall be as happy together as the average of married people are. He won't expect too much; he knows what has been, and will be content to take me as I am. And I think a woman does better to marry, for what else can she do with herself? I am not like you," she added, with a pitiful quivering of the lip; "I can't stand alone, Pauline."

"Then, for God's sake, Miss Pembury," cried Polly, impetuously, "take care that the crutch you lean upon is whole and sound, and one that will never fail you in your need. A marriage without love! I think it is the most awful thing that can be. You will wrong the man you marry as much as you wrong yourself. And he must be a poor thing to be content with one bit less than the whole heart of his wife. Only to think of it! Days and nights in the closest companionship with one for whom, at best, you only feel a lukewarm friendship. "It is horrible!" said Polly, with a shudder. "Only to think of all that marriage is—of all that it involves; and to enter it on the strength of a faint liking for a gentlemanly acquaintance! And if children come—" she added, crimsoning as if with her own vehemence; "do not be very angry with me, Miss Pembury, if I tell you how it seems to me then. Do you remember that girl with her nameless child we saw at the gates of your park the day you came home to it? You said that child—such a bright, rosy little thing it looked, too—was her disgrace. It does seem to me that if a woman marries for the sake of a home, or a vocation, or a position in society,—for anything but because she believes the man she marries is worthy of all the love and all the esteem and respect that she can give him,—that her children, too, are her disgrace as much as if they came of an unwedded mother. If a woman chooses to sell herself, I think her shame is none the less because she has a gold ring and a name thrown into the bargain."

"You speak plainly, Miss Brooke," said Millicent, almost as coldly as if, like Mrs. Danvers, she thought it necessary sometimes to put her dependent back "in her place." Polly detected the change in her tone.

"I beg your pardon if I have spoken too plainly," she said; "but you did me the honor, Miss Pembury, when you asked me to accept the situation of your companion, to tell me that you did not so much want a hired dependent about you, ready to make herself useful in all manner of miscellaneous services, as a friend, and, it might sometimes be, an adviser. I told you I was young, inexperienced, and not particularly clever; but you told me you were desolate, lonely, and sisterless—that you had had a great trouble, which seemed to have taken all the energy and zest out of your life. You told me, too, that my companionship, as that of a girl who had been

obliged to think and act for herself, might be of service to you; that you would bear with such deficiencies as I told you of; and that you would never find fault with me for the sin of over-frankness. I've been guilty of that sin now, I'm afraid; but it seems as if I could not measure my words when I saw you—you, Miss Pembury, with all that God has given you, with all the means and opportunities which He has placed in your hands—ready to commit what does seem to me a woman's greatest sin, just because one trouble has come to you amidst so many blessings, and to fling away your whole life just because you don't know what better to do with it."

"And what better can I do with it?" cried Millicent, querulously. "You're visionary and impracticable, Pauline; and you don't know—you don't know, you never can know—how hard my life is at times. If I could only escape from myself. There would be something for me to do if I were married; one has then so many claims to which one must attend; and I should do my duty fairly by Mr. Tilburne, and he wouldn't expect too much of me."

"That is very fortunate," said Polly, dryly; and, rising from the chair she had taken opposite Millicent, she proceeded to put away her out-door garments. Her hands were trembling and her lips quivering, for Millicent had grieved and vexed her; and something she had seen while out of doors had grieved and vexed her too; and Polly was neither saint nor stoic. But she turned her face away from Millicent, and busied herself in smoothing the plumes of her hat, and folding her jacket, as if the care of her garments were all she was thinking of. Millicent watched her nervously. She had grown very fond of Polly. This girl, who had never known either sister or mother, felt, in the strong yet tender, the self-sustaining and yet self-forgetful, nature of her companion, something that supplied the needs of her own weaker organization.

She had grieved her friend; she never thought of Polly as her paid companion. Millicent was strong in her affections, if strong in little else; and her love for Polly was loyal and large enough, not merely to bridge over the gulf between their respective positions, but to make Millicent, at least, forget it almost entirely.

She rose now, and went to Polly, and bent over her caressingly.

"I've vexed you," she said; "you're crying, Pauline!" and she looked at her in amazement. "I—I never thought," she said simply, "that tears were possible to you!"

"I've shed plenty of them, however," said Polly, wiping away the present ones as she spoke. "Yes, I have been vexed," she added, kissing the beautiful face bent lovingly toward her own. "I have been vexed, and grieved, and shamed, by something I have seen and heard—oh! grieved and shamed more than I can say," she added, the color mounting in her face as she spoke; "and then I came in and found you, Miss Pembury, with all your life before you, rich, honored, *pure!* talk of flinging yourself away because you wished so to forget the one trouble of your life. Oh! after what I have just seen, it does seem to me a monstrous and a dreadful thing that girls like you and me—for though you are rich and I am poor, we, at least, are equal there—my home has been as safe as yours—should dare to talk, as we sometimes do, of the troubles

that, we think, make our lives so insupportable, while other girls grow up without having one chance given them of becoming good women; go astray because they have had no chance of going right —fall, as it is called, because they have never for an hour been beyond the reach of temptation!"

"I don't see what this has to do with you or me," said Millicent. with just a little return of her former iciness.

"God forgive you, Miss Pembury, if, as the years go by, and you are older and better able to look into things for yourself, you don't see that it has everything to do with you!" said Polly. "May I tell you what I have seen, and what it has made me think? May I tell you, that is, without being thought to presume beyond my place as your paid companion?"

"Do I remind you so often of your place, Pauline?" said Millicent, her face crimsoning. Then she caught hold of Polly's hands as impulsively as if she had been Polly herself. "Don't quarrel with me, dear. If I have vexed you in any way, forgive me. And now, if you wish, speak on."

"I have seen Fanny Gill," said Polly; "Fanny Gill and her baby."

"She was not fit for you to know or to speak to," said Millicent. "If you err, Polly, it is that you are sometimes too kind-hearted and pitiful toward wrong-doers."

"I had to go on some errand in the village, as you know, for Mrs. Danvers," said Polly, without heeding Millicent's dignified little rebuke, "and as I was coming home I was stopped by a woman, looking decent and tidy enough, but with an anxious face. She made bold, she told me, to ask me if I would ask Mrs. Danvers or you to let her daughter have some port wine. I asked about her daughter. She told me she was ill, and she was ordered everything that was nourishing; and with her father's wages, fourteen shillings a-week, how was it possible for them to obtain it? "An' then there's her baby dragging her," said the mother; and spoke of Fanny's "misfortune,"—it's always a misfortune. Well, poor things! they had need to be merciful to one another. Then I knew the girl must be the one I had seen at your gates, Miss Pembury, the day you brought me to this house, which, till to-day, has seemed to me a little earthly Paradise. I had heard Mrs. Danvers speak of her as of a sinner—not exactly as Christ once spoke of sinners, however—and I thought I would see if she was in such need as the woman said, and if so, ask for help, or give it myself. I am rich enough, thanks to you, to indulge in the luxury of a little benevolence. Well, the poor girl is very bad; her beauty has faded wonderfully, even in the little time since we saw her. I was very shocked and grieved to see her. But oh! Miss Pembury, her surroundings grieved and shocked me more. One room, bare to the rafters, poorly furnished, but fairly clean, and three beds in it, such as they were, to serve for father, mother, grown-up brothers, this girl, her baby, and a sister, a year older than Fanny herself. She is lying there day and night, and there is no decent privacy, no possibility of meeting any of the requirements of illness, and her baby is in her arms; and how would it have been possible, unless by a special miracle, that this girl should have escaped the shame that has come upon her? Shame! I don't believe she feels it. How should she?

What can she know of purity and womanliness, of modesty or self-respect, with such surroundings as she seems to have had from her birth? Oh! to look upon such a girl as this, not seventeen, and with her nameless child in her arms, and feel that, but for God's favor, we might have been as she is, soulless, shameless, as the animals that browse in the fields!"

"Yes, it is very shocking," said Millicent, her fair face paling; "but you should not have gone there, Pauline. Such things are not for you to meddle with."

"No; there it is! that seems to be such a pitiful mockery. Girls like you and me are not to know the things other girls are called on to endure. And yet she is younger than we—little more than a child—and has such a pretty baby face. It was the innocent, child-like prettiness that struck me the first time I saw her."

"Innocent!" said Millicent.

"Yes; I can understand the innocence of that look even now—even now that I have seen the den she calls her home. She has gone wrong because she has had no chance of learning right. She has not turned from the light and chosen darkness. The light has never been hers to choose."

"Our clergyman is a good man, and I have taught that girl myself in the Sunday School," said Millicent, with a little austerity.

"Yes, I know what Sunday School teaching is; but it won't meet such a case as this. Did you ever tell her in plain words to be chaste, discreet and modest? and, if you had done so, what a wretched mockery it would have been with such a home as hers to go to. Just one room where men, maid, matron and little ones live. They couldn't even, as I at first suggested, make some better provision by sending the brothers below. Where the floor is not mud it is brick, and the damp ooses through, "an' would cripple the lads afore their time if they slept there," as the mother said. Crippled they will be ultimately, with such a floor to their living-room, but they are naturally anxious to postpone their fate as long as may be, so it isn't to be wondered at if even the girl's death-hour fails to teach her how great a sinner she has been, any more than the Sunday School lessons saved her from being one."

"I am very sorry," said Millicent, "but I don't think the houses in Radley are worse than in other parts of Hertfordshire; and I still think, Pauline, it would have been better for you to have kept away. You can do so little good, and it seems hardly fit that you should see or know such things."

Polly shuddered. "I shall never forget what I have seen and learned to-day. To think of it! That a girl should grow up to womanhood without one chance being given her of learning what is good and pure and honest. And here we are! So delicately housed, so daintily fed, with not a sight or sound to offend a single sense; and that girl is dying in her shame and sin. Sin, oh! I don't think all the sin lies at the door of Fanny Gill!"

Millicent walked hastily up and down the room; then she stopped short, and facing Polly, said abruptly,—"I suppose you think it lies at mine?"

"Not yet, God forbid that I should dare to say that, yet," cried Polly. "You have hardly had time to realize your own position,

your own responsibilities. But it seems to me the time has come now. Oh! Millicent Pembury, you asked me to be your friend, to stand by you, to help you bear the trouble of your life. Here is a way to bear that trouble, to crush it, to forget it as a thing not worth regarding when compared to the troubles of those around. Here are you, a girl, rich, refined, good, pure; how should you ever have been anything else?—and here are these other girls, who have not had one chance of goodness given them, living, dying, like the brutes that perish, and no man caring for them. Then the more reason that some woman should! And you might be that woman! Here is your work. Around you, at your very gates. These are your poor, your people: the work that God has given you to do is close to your hand. I'm not religious!" added Polly, passionately; "at least I can't talk religion; but do you know that when I came from Fanny Gill's room to this, and saw you sitting with folded hands and troubled face, I thought of the parable of the talents, and how much had been given to you. And you would fling yourself away upon this Mr. Tilburne just because you don't know what better to do with yourself, when all this work is waiting ready for your hand."

"He might help me to do it," said Millicent.

"I'd be sure of that before I took him into partnership," replied Polly. "He may be a man, better and more unselfish than are many of his class, and he may leave you the right to do as you like with your own, which men don't always do where their wives are concerned. But I'd be very certain on these points first. I'd be very sure that he was a good and generous man, if I were you, who would not make me a worse woman than I should have been without him. Let him wait a while, till you know more of him. I think you're worth the waiting for, Miss Pembury," said Polly, drawing up her slender figure, as if proud of her friend notwithstanding her fault-finding.

"Although the shame of Fanny Gill lies at my door?" said Millicent gravely.

"I did not say that," replied Polly, quickly. "But I do say that it rests with you that other Fanny Gills on your estate shall at least have a possibility of growing up into good women, And I do say that, for their sake as well as your own, you ought to be very careful that Mr. Tilburne would be worth all the honor and all the respect that a wife should give a husband."

"Mr. Tilburne would never come up to your standard, Pauline," said Millicent.

"And I should never be satisfied with less, for you," said Polly. "No; nor for any one for whom I cared."

"Just give me a little time to think it over, and don't tell Aunt Danvers you have seen Fanny Gill. She would be so shocked. If I see into matters for myself, she will be still more shocked. It will be a terrible struggle. I feel half afraid when I think of it. I know some one who could help me, who has talked to me upon such things before now, but not so fiercely as you have done; but I don't know when I shall be brave enough to go to her."

"Brave enough?"

"Yes; it is Mrs. Gordon."

CHAPTER XIX.

HORACE GORDON'S MOTHER.

MILLICENT had said that she felt hardly brave enough to meet the mother of her lover. In truth, the two women had kept apart from each other since the sin of Horace Gordon had come between them. Mrs. Gordon had felt, as she said, ashamed to meet the eyes of the girl her son had so wronged; and, to Millicent it had seemed as if to see her would re-open all the old wounds which time seemed, at least, beginning to deaden. But she resolved that she would go to Mrs. Gordon now. If she was to do anything better with her life than spend it in useless repinings and vain regrets, or what, to Polly, seemed even worse, contract a sheerly conventional marriage, just for the sake of being a wife, Mrs. Gordon could help her.

For Mrs. Gordon was a woman who had made her mark in her little world. She could do things with impunity which, in that world, very few would have ventured to do; and this without incurring even any suspicion of eccentricity or oddity. On the contrary, even the most Conservative of Hertfordshire squires, those most wedded to old usages and customs, would call Mrs. Gordon a sensible woman—"By Jove! sir, the most sensible woman I ever knew in my life,"—and yet the sensible woman countenanced the very innovations that every Hertfordshire squire thought most prejudicial to the existing state of things; and, in her own parish, had, with the help of the rector, whom she had enlisted on her side, effected little less than a social revolution.

But whatever Mrs. Gordon did she did quietly, and never flew needlessly in the face of her world. And through conforming to the ways of the world in small matters, one is often allowed to take one's own unchecked in great. And she had held her own so carefully, in such trying circumstances, that it had begun to be thought that everything she did was safest, wisest, discreetest, best. She had been the neglected wife of a very gay and very bad husband, and had borne her sorrows with a dignified reticence that, if it seemed to disdain sympathy, at least commanded respect. Then, when she became a widow, quite young and handsome enough to marry again, she had kept her suitors at so safe a distance without offending any, and let it be seen that she was living chiefly for the sake of her son, that she was considered as much a model mother as she had been a model wife. When her son "went wrong," nobody blamed Mrs. Gordon; nobody said, as is so often said in similar cases, that the home-training was responsible for his misconduct, that he had been either spoiled too little or indulged too much, and, that his mother had only herself to thank for her son having become an evil-doer.

No; Mrs. Gordon still commanded all sympathy and respect; and even the fact that, during her son's minority, she contrived, while nursing the estates round, to repair the best of the cottages on the estate, to rebuild the worst, and to support the schools liberally,

was only set down as another proof of her good management; that with such limited means she should be able to do such things, was a sufficient proof of her sound sense in doing them. Those who would have let their own tenants herd like swine in pigstyes, only approved Mrs. Gordon's economy in being able, with such slender resources, to do so well by hers.

Even Mrs. Danvers looked up to Mrs. Gordon. Though that lady was suspected of knowing very much more of works political, literary, and scientific than Mrs. Danvers thought it expedient that most women should know, she had not a word of censure for Mrs. Gordon. She was privileged to take her own path and follow it. Besides, Mrs. Danvers always followed the world, and, as the world said Mrs. Gordon was a sensible woman, who could do no wrong, Mrs. Danvers thought it only due to herself to echo its opinion.

Slowly wakening to the consciousness that she had not to live for herself alone,—that there was something more required of her than to sit down and moan over her own hurt, or to seek to deaden her consciousness of it by means as unworthy and as vile as an unloving marriage would be,—Millicent resolved to seek Mrs. Gordon. "She will help me, if any one can," she said to Polly; "and she was always very kind. I don't think I have done right in staying away so long."

The next day Millicent informed Mrs. Danvers of her intention of driving over to the Holmes that day. As a rule, Mrs. Danvers accompanied her niece on visits in the neighborhood, when well enough; when she was not well enough, Milicent stayed at home. But she had been so much in the habit of going to the Holmes by herself, that her doing so now seemed only a resumption of her former habit, and Mrs. Danvers, who had a cold, and felt disposed to nurse it, said,—"Quite right. I think you should have gone sooner. I daresay Mrs. Gordon expected you. There will be a little awkwardness at first, but it will soon pass over. You should call: after all that has passed, it will be a very proper attention on your part."

Mrs. Gordon was alone when Millicent came. She was a tall woman, with a good presence, and a face that was still handsome, though she had seen her fiftieth autumn, and she was carefully dressed in a gray merino, fashionably made, and the little cap she wore and the accessories of her dress were all good and well-chosen. It is doubtful whether Mrs. Gordon would have been supposed to know so much more than other women knew, and to do things that few squires, still less squiresses, would do, and all without the slightest imputation on her good sense, if it had not been that in her dress, and in all such minor matters, she was careful to observe the conventionalities. She had dark luxuriant hair, but it had grown very gray of late, and her lips were compressed as if with habitual pain, and Millicent saw at a glance that she had aged very much since she had last seen her. Trouble had told upon her.

She had been sitting in a small apartment which, from the time she first came to the Holmes, had been looked upon as peculiarly her own. There was a writing-table, or secrétaire, in it with many

drawers, and in some of these she had been looking—sorting and arranging papers, and going over old memorials of the past: her son's letters, from the time he wrote, in a round, schoolboy hand, a request for a cake or a hamper of apples, to the flowing lines and more polished phrases of later years. How she had loved her boy! He had been just her all, for she had been so doubly widowed. Her husband had been lost to her in his life, and his death had brought nothing but a sense of relief—of thankfulness that she was free from the degrading thralldom of such a marriage as hers. But the boy seemed her compensation. He had been so sweet and winning, and tender, and kind—all that grave, reticent women like herself, with a touch of austerity at the root of the character, love best in the men they have to do with. And now he had gone out of her life in such a sort that she could envy mothers whose sons had only died, and wonder sometimes how these could give themselves up to grief when they had nothing but death to weep for.

Her face grew yet a little paler when she looked on Millicent; then she rose, and, stepping forward, drew the girl into her arms, and kissed her fondly. She had taken Millicent to her heart as a daughter; for Millicent had been a girl to be loved before this trouble had come upon her and embittered her sweetness, and turned her gentleness into feebleness; but since the trouble had come, Mrs. Gordon had shrunk from seeing her whom her son had so injured.

"This is very good of you, my dear," she said. "It is more than I dared hope for."

"Why did you not come to me, mamma?" said Millicent. She had acquired the habit of calling Mrs. Gordon by that name during her engagement, and it came back to her lips instinctively now. To the motherless girl it had been very sweet and very easy to love the mother of her lover as if she were her own.

"I could not come, Millicent," said the elder lady, her face darkening; "I could not come," she repeated, and in a lower tone, "for very shame."

"Mamma, mamma!" Millicent sobbed, "don't let that come between us. Can't you and I be as we were?"

"If you will let it be so, my dear, I shall be only too glad," was the answer. "Now tell me about yourself. I have heard that you have been ill, and in London. How long have you been back? How are you now? Have the London doctors done you good? Let me hear everything."

"Yes, mamma." Millicent sat down, obediently as a child, and, as Mrs. Gordon had desired, proceeded to tell her how things had been of late. "I shall tell you everything," she said; "for I want you to help me in many ways. And one thing, first of all—I have seen *him*."

"Him who was my son—Horace Gordon?"

"Don't say *was*, mamma—*is*," cried Millicent impetuously.

"Well, *is*. I suppose, after all, mothers can't tear their children out of their very hearts. If he were ill, I suppose I should go and nurse him—if in serious trouble, try and help him; but he can never be as he was, Millicent."

"He asked me to forget the past, and let things be as they had been," said Millicent, softly.

"He is a thorough man," said the mother, her lip curling; "thinks that women were born only to suffer, and to kiss the hand that smites them. Well, Millicent?" and there was that in her eyes which told Millicent that if she had yielded to Horace Gordon's suit, his mother would have had but little pity for her weakness.

"Well, I—I—hesitated. Oh, mamma, I *did* so love him!" The words came with a cry, as if the girl had been sharply hurt. "I think I should have yielded," she went on tremulously, "but for the advice of one whom I asked to help me because she was a girl like myself, and so I thought could feel for me. Thanks to her, I did not yield. I wrote to him that what he asked could not be, and that all was at an end between us."

"I am glad of it," said the mother, gravely. "After what has been, Millicent, if you had stooped to my son, I doubt if I could ever have loved you again as my daughter."

"You think I did right?" asked Millicent, anxiously. "Sometimes it has seemed to me as if I had been too hard: as if I might have helped him—saved him—if I had decided differently."

"God forbid that you should make such a sacrifice for the sake of such a sinner! He was meaner than I thought," added Mrs. Gordon, her face crimsoning, "or he would not have asked you. The partner of his sin seems to me the only possible partner of his life."

She would not have broken bread with that woman, or have slept under the same roof with her for a night; she loathed her as a sinner, who, if she had not lured her son to his destruction, had, at least, been only too ready to walk hand in hand with him to their mutual ruin. But even to her she would mete out justice. For her son's sake, this wretched creature had lost home, and friends, and good repute, and what poor amends it was possible for him to make he should render.

"That is what Pauline Brooke has told me," said Millicent. "But oh, mamma, it was so hard to give him up!"

"Very hard," said the other, in the same quiet, unvarying tone in which she had hitherto spoken. "I should know a little more about that than you, Millicent. You may have another love, but I shall never have another son."

"Some one has wanted to be that other," said Millicent, after a pause.

"Yes, I suppose so. That is very likely. I hope that this time your choice will be a worthy one, Millicent."

"I don't know that as yet I have chosen at all," said Millicent. "I shall never love as I loved Horace."

"No, it is a woful waste, poor child; but he has had the best of your life. But if you have chosen a good man, Millicent, and can respect and honor him him with all your heart, love may come in time. And I should so like to see you happy," she added, with a pitiful yearning in her voice.

"I never looked at the thing in that light," said Millicent. "It is Mr. Tilburne who has asked me. I never asked myself whether I felt for him all you say I should feel. He is well enough, and you

know what Aunt Danvers is, and how she believes in marriage as the chief end of a woman's existence. If I take Mr. Tilburne, it will be partly because she advises me to do it; partly because, if I marry, it may as well be him as any other."

"And you mean to marry because you don't know what better to do with yourself,—is that it, Millicent?"

"I suppose so," wearily. "A girl must marry at one time or another."

"I don't see the necessity—" almost in Polly's words. "That is, if you do not see any one for whom you can feel differently to what you do for Mr. Tilburne. Do you know, Millicent, that people sometimes wonder at my patience—the patience, as they call it, with which I bore the hardships and indignities of my married life. I dare say you may have heard something of it. Patience! they might better call it penitence! When I was a girl I committed two great blunders. I loved a man who was not worthy any woman's love; and when I found that things were so, I made a greater, and married a man still more unworthy, and whom I did not love at all. Most people, women especially, were of your Aunt Danvers's opinion, at that time of day, that if a girl did not marry, she had made a failure of her life. Well, I did not want to make a failure of mine, and Mr. Gordon came in my way, and I took him, just as you are thinking of taking Mr. Tilburne, because I did not know what better to do with myself. Well, there is no use in going over those miserable years; there is no use in telling you the penalty I had to pay for that second blunder of mine. I had sense enough to accept my punishment meekly, and to make the best of the life I had made for myself. If my husband had sinned against me, I had sinned against him, and against myself too. I had wronged myself more than he could ever wrong me. If I could not have been a happy woman, I might, at least, have been a good, pure, self-sufficing one. And goodness is very hard, and purity, in the right sense of the word, impossible, where a woman has married unworthily. The horror of those years! The degradation and the shame of the union with a man of low taste and debased mind! The impossibility of preserving one's self-respect, of not suffering some contamination from the constant contact with such a being! I don't say that your Mr. Tilburne is all this, Milly; but, mind you, ready as I was, in the *ennui* and the disappointment that hourly beset me, to marry, I did not think that Mr. Gordon was what I afterward found him. I married upon trust, took my husband blindly, and hadn't the excuse of love to plead for my blindness. Don't you do as I did, and marry upon trust, too."

Mrs. Gordon paused, and seemed, for a moment, lost in painful thought. It was a rare thing to hear her speak of her husband—she never did so if she could help it; she seemed to strive, as far as it was possible, to put him out of her remembrance. After a while she went on in a low tone. Sometimes it seemed as if the pain that in other women would vent itself in tears and sobs, took, with her, the form of compression and reticence. Her words now seemed to come out against her will.

"A woman should remember that when she marries she has not only herself to think of, but those as yet unborn. When my son

proved himself a double liar,—when he wronged you, so innocent, and that other woman, so guilty,—it seemed as if it only wanted that to complete the measure of my punishment. He was his father's son in all he did! And I was only justly punished for ever having stopped to bear a son to such a father! It was *then* I felt my degradation to the uttermost. It was *then* I felt what I had become when I linked myself to a man of whom I knew so little, and for whom I felt nothing but that careless, shallow liking which I could have felt as easily for any other. Oh, Millicent! you don't know how I have shrunk from meeting your eyes, because I felt ashamed of being the mother of the man who has wronged you!"

Mrs. Gordon turned her face away, and Millicent knew that it was to hide her tears. She was a woman who found it as hard to weep as if she were a man. Millicent drew her hand in hers, and pressed it softly.

"Mamma, don't let any thought of that ever come between us."

Presently Mrs. Gordon turned to her with a calm, almost cheerful face.

"I have said my say, Milly; think matters over by yourself. Now let us talk of something else."

"Yes, indeed, there is something else I want to talk over with you," said Millicent; "something besides Mr. Tilburne. It seems to me that things in Radley are not quite as they should be. I suppose Aunt Danvers has let Hammond have his own way, and I daresay he has thought of my interests; but then that is not everything—the cottages are not what they should be, I'm afraid."

"I don't think they are," said Mrs. Gordon, dryly. "The cottages in Radley are about as bad as any in Hertfordshire, Milly, and that is saying a great deal."

"But what am I to do, mamma?" cried Millicent, almost fretfully. Sometimes, when she felt her weakness most, she chafed against it, and felt inclined to be angry with other people, as if the fault were theirs. "How am I to help it? Some of the things are so shocking, even for a lady to speak about, and Aunt Danvers will be so horrified when she thinks of my meddling with them."

"Yes, I know Mrs. Danvers," said Mrs. Gordon, with a faint smile: "and there is no doubt that she will be scandalized if you look into these things for yourself, for, indeed, they are not pleasant things for women to meddle with; but think what they must be for women to endure! If you had become my son's wife, Milly, I should have asked you to let me lend a helping hand in Radley."

"Oh, I wish you would lend it now!" cried Millicent. "Some of the things are so shocking, so horrible, that I hear of, and I don't know which way to turn or how to help them."

"What has brought such matters before you so suddenly?" asked Mrs. Gordon. "You always appeared to me in as enviable a state of young-lady ignorance as even Mrs. Danvers could wish you to be."

"It was Pauline Brooke, and what she told me of Fanny Gill—Fanny Gill and her child, who knows no father," said Millicent, flushing. "Oh, mamma! when I think of this wretched girl, and the way in which she and others are huddled and herded together at the very gates of my own home, it seems as if their shame was

mine—as if I, living in luxury and wealth, were answerable for all their degradation and misery. They are my people, and I have let them perish body and soul!" And Millicent buried her face in her hands, and cried remorsefully.

"*Your* soul has woke, at least," said Mrs. Gordon, looking at her curiously. "I should like to see this Miss Brooke," she said. "If its young queen means to make of Radley a place fit for Christians to live in, it seems to me as if Miss Brooke might do for her Prime Minister."

"She is the dearest, bravest, strongest little thing," cried Millicent. "Not strong-minded, mamma—strong in heart and soul, like you. I think I could do something with her by my side, and you for help and counselor; but there is Aunt Danvers."

"And decorum, which prohibits a young lady looking too closely into foul and ugly things. And there is a great deal that is very unpleasantly practical to be encountered in setting a village to rights. But I will face the worst for you, Milly. I believe your Aunt Danvers thinks I am one of those who can do no wrong, and I will go into matters myself with Mr. Hammond—and suppose we let Mr. Tilburne stand over for the present, Milly. Perhaps by the time Radley is renovated, we shall find we can do very well without him."

CHAPTER XX.

AMANDA'S PROMOTION.

A LITTLE time after Amanda had come to take care of her uncle, Mr. Sampson began to think he had made money enough. The idea had never occurred to him before. He had gone every day to his place of business, and come home every night a richer man than he had been in the morning, without once asking himself why, when his annual income apart from that business was so much more than he cared to spend, he should go on increasing it. He never would have asked himself that question if his wife had lived. He would have gone on eating and drinking of the best; adding thousand to thousand; content to lead his unpretending life of solid, luxurious comfort, if Mrs. Sampson had not left her post as mistress of his house and Amanda entered on it.

Mr. Sampson believed in Amanda as the simplest and most guileless of women. So did most men. And she was not clever; she never read a book worth reading; and she could not have given an intelligent opinion of any subject of the day. But she was clever in her own way; that is, she had plenty of the smaller change of cunning, which served her purpose as well, or better, than would the higher coinage of the brain. And Amanda had a great deal of quiet, persistent obstinacy. After all, what is there more invincible than a fool! And Amanda had resolved, as soon as she entered her uncle's house, that she would let him have no rest in it till he left it for one in a more aristocratic situation. But she never told him that, on the contrary, she professed to be charmed with the house and its surroundings. She liked the shops; there was really no need, with such good linen-drapers, to go to the West End, only,

of course, now and then a lady wanted things which only Howell & James or Swan & Edgar could supply. And the railway was so convenient, and the omnibus would have been so handy, only that her dear uncle was good enough to let her have a carriage. And if the air was rather close after the country, and the gas-works smelled, and the odor of the different factories would come in at the windows, she supposed that people must expect such things who lived in town. Did her uncle call this almost country? Well, so it was, only a great deal livelier and pleasanter. But did not her uncle think that the air from the marshes was rather damp? She liked a damp air herself; indeed, any air agreed with her. She was so tough, she never ailed anything. Still she fancied that damp air had something to do with dear uncle's rheumatism, and the next time Mr. Sampson felt a little ache in his bones, he thought it was a great one, and wondered it had never occurred to him, how damp the air was from the marshes, before.

If Mr. Sampson's head ached, it was caused by the smell of the gas-works; and, thanks to Amanda's petting and pitying, and anxious looks, he was led to fancy it very often ached now. Before long, without knowing how he had arrived at the conclusion, he was convinced that Hackney disagreed with him, and began to entertain ideas of moving to a more salubrious quarter.

But where should he go? Amanda had heard that Kensington was mild and dry, and the Gardens would be so heavenly for her dear uncle when his day's work was over, or on Sundays. Or Bayswater,—some said there was no air like Bayswater; what did dear uncle think of that? But dear uncle did not think that either Bayswater or Kensington would do at all. If the former had been what it was when he was a boy, and if in some leafy lane he could have found a Queen Anne mansion like the one he was now living in, he would have been content enough. But he detested the streets and squares of stuccoed palaces that had sprung up where, such a little time back, cottages nestled under trees, or roomy red-brick mansions were embowered in their gardens. He thought he might meet with something like what he wanted at Kew or Hammersmith, or possibly at Fulham; and Amanda, who would almost as soon have remained as she was, due East, as have gone so far West, was positive that all these were damp and unwholesome, misty and foggy, on account of their proximity to the river. Dear uncle's cough would be worse than ever if he ventured into any of these unhealthy localities.

Just when Mr. Sampson was most puzzled how to please his niece and himself at the same time,—or rather, how to select a house that would meet her anxious requirements about his health,—he became unexpectedly the master of one. Some years back he had, by the advice of his solicitor (an old friend and neighbor of his, who had a very snug City practice, dined every year with each successive Lord Mayor, and gave capital dinners himself to his clients), invested some spare thousands in a mortgage on the house and estate of a little Hertfordshire squire. Of late years there had been great difficulty in obtaining the interest, and at last the payments failed utterly, the squire went to the Continent—where was not exactly known, but he had disappeared from the eyes of men

—and then, the mortgage having been foreclosed, Mr. Sampson found himself a landed proprietor.

If this had happened in Mrs. Sampson's lifetime, her husband would have directed his solicitor to dispose of the property to the best advantage; but now it seemed as if the acquisition of this old mansion and the adjacent demesne was a special interposition of Providence in his favor. Why should he not occupy the house himself? Why not settle down at once to a country life, and rest for the remainder of his days? It would be the best thing possible for his health; even Amanda herself must see that, though he was a little afraid that she would find the country rather dull.

Amanda's heart sank within her when her uncle first broached the subject to her. Give up London and all its glories, the delights she had so looked forward to of appearing at the Opera, or in Rotten Row, and be buried alive in an old country house forty miles from town! That was her first feeling; her next was that a country life, in a large country house of good standing, and with all the appointments of a wealthy household, was a very different thing from life in a farm-house. From that farm-house in which her early youth had been spent, Amanda had seen from afar the "County." She had heard with envious ears of race and hunting balls, from which she had been shut out,—she had been condescended to by the squire's daughters, and mildly patronized by his wife, till she had hated them as much as her weak little nature would suffer her to hate anything. And now she might be as good as a squire's wife or daughter herself! The "County" would certainly call at such a house as her uncle described Clayfield Hall to be, and she might form a circle in Hertfordshire of a better class than any of his City friends. After all, if she went to the West of London, she might be a long time forming desirable acquaintances there. "One's next-door neighbors are afraid of being sociable here," thought Amanda; "and what would be the use of driving in the Park, or going to the play, and not meeting a soul that one knows? Now, if one gets on well with the "County," it may be useful in the way of introductions. Fashionable people all seem to know one another; and when one does come to town, for I don't fancy stopping in Hertfordshire all the year through, one may meet with acquaintances that one's made there. And to be of the 'County' one's self, and live at 'the House,' and sit in the great pew at church, and have every one bobbing and courtesying when one comes out, and looking at one's bonnet, and wondering what one's dress cost—let one have what one may, there's sure to be somebody else with a new, in London, bonnet or dress."

"I shall give you a new open carriage if we go to Hertfordshire, Amanda," said Uncle Sampson, by way of propitiation; "and we shall go to the seaside just the same as if we were still living in town."

"Thank you, uncle. I don't care for the carriage myself. I've never been used to one, you know," said Amanda, with pretty humility; "but I'm sure the more you are out in the open air the better, and a fortnight at Brighton in November would do you so much good. I think it's November that they say is such a very healthy month at Brighton?"

"I don't know about that, but I believe it is a very lively one," said Uncle Sampson; "but that will suit us both, Amanda. I can look at the sea, and you can look at the shops, and then we'll come back to our town house, and keep our Christmas. You'll have to be a sort of Lady Bountiful—give away blankets and petticoats to the old women, and help the parson with his coal-club and his school. Why, it'll be like old times coming back again, when I was a boy—only we hadn't much to do with the charities, for we were too poor to give, and not poor enough to take. Things come round, Mandie—things come round in this world," said Uncle Sampson, with a comfortable, rich unctuous chuckle, and rolling his loose cash over in his pocket; "things come round—things come round," he repeated.

"I'm sure, Uncle Sampson, you deserve that everything that's good should come round to you," said Amanda; "but I don't think, uncle, that, knowing so many people as you do in town, and with that cough of yours,—which I'm sure will want the best of advice to keep under, and country doctors, we know, are not always to be relied on,—that you ought quite to bury yourself in the country. If you were to come up for a month or six weeks—say in June—I always think there ain't half the blacks about in London in June that there are at other times, and the air seems so nice and fresh just then. And then you should put yourself under one of these great London doctors, and he would make you all right for the twelvemonth—and it needn't be so expensive; I should think we should get lodgings somewhere at the West—for one mustn't be too far from the doctors—for thirty shillings or so a-week."

"Oh, if we come to London, either for the doctors or to give you a peep at the fine folks, we needn't look at things so close as that, Mandie," said Uncle Sampson, who was in high good humor that his niece was so easy to settle down in the country. "A small furnished house for a few weeks near one of the parks won't ruin me, I daresay."

Then Amanda felt satisfied with herself and her prospects. A country house in Hertfordshire, with "the County" on visiting terms, November at Brighton, and June in London, truly these were things to make her rejoice in her powers of management. How she would have liked to have Polly near her that she might dilate upon them to her!—Polly, who was always so provokingly honest and plain-spoken. "Just as if one *could* get through the world without telling a fib now and then," said Amanda to herself, "if only for peace and quietness' sake; but Polly never could be brought to look at things in a rational light."

Then she remembered that Radley, where Polly was located, was only five miles from Clayfield. Polly had written to her twice since her arrival there, having an idea that some attention was due to her as her father's widow, "though I daresay Amanda has pretty well forgotten me by this time," thought Polly. But Amanda had never answered these letters. She was thoroughly lazy, and never did anything that, by any possibility, she could get any one else to do for her; and as she could not very well employ either the cook or the upper housemaid, clever in her way as each of these domes-

tics was, to answer her letters, both Polly's and those of her own sisters remained unanswered.

"Besides," as Amanda said, "what was the use of keeping in with Polly? She wasn't much better than a lady's-maid—companion, indeed—it comes to pretty much the same thing—and she had no right to expect her friends to look after her if she lowered herself by accepting such a situation."

But Amanda, though as great an egotist as Mrs. Danvers, was not half so clever or far-sighted a one. Mrs. Danvers made a point of keeping in with everybody. It was impossible to tell when the most unlikely people might be of service, and a few civil words and a postage-stamp went such a long way and cost so little. Her correspondence was large, but so was her circle; and if her niece's house had been closed to her, she might have visited almost to the end of her natural life amongst the relatives of her several husbands. Amanda began to think she had made a blunder in slighting Polly, but she had no false shame in hastening to retrieve it.

"If this Miss Pembury that's taken her up is really partial to her, she may do a good deal for me on Polly's account. It's an old place, by what Polly said of it, and the Pemburys have been there for ages. No doubt anybody that *is* anybody for twenty miles visits at the Hall. I'll write to Polly, telling her I haven't had time to do it before, and when we are a bit settled, and I've got the new carriage, I'll call on her. Won't Polly open her eyes to think of my being a county lady! I only hope she'll never let any one know her father kept a chemist's shop. If she'll only pass him off for a doctor, I sha'n't hurt through having married him. But Polly never could be brought to look at things in a rational light."

CHAPTER XXI.

POLLY MEETS "THE DOCTOR" AGAIN.

Mrs. Gordon was again alone in her usual sitting-room; but it was some weeks since Millicent had paid her visit there and made confession and asked help, and the spring was coming in fast, the snowdrops had given way to the crocuses, which were making the borders of the Holmes gardens gay with purple and gold. The day was clear and bright; there was a faint, tender breath of summer in the air; one of those sweet spring days to rejoice the heart of any one for whom all was not henceforth to be clad in gray and sober tints.

Mrs. Gordan had her writing-table drawn by the window, and she was looking out on the garden, bathed in the soft spring sunshine, as if even tc her it brought a little gladness. Since she and Millicent had again been brought in contact, things had seemed less hard to her; there was a new interest, or rather the old one had awoke again. Millicent had crept back to her place in her heart; and then the task of helping her in her new work had been one to call out all Mrs. Gordon's energies. There had been Mrs. Danvers to soothe and propitiate, but that had not been so very difficult a task, for in Mrs. Danvers's eyes Mrs. Gordon could do no wrong.

Every one said she was so sensible a woman, and had behaved so admirably in all the trying circumstances of her life, and Mrs. Danvers always adopted the general opinion as her own. And then Mr. Gordon was so well connected, it was impossible that a lady with so many relations in the peerage could do anything very wrong; and therefore Mrs. Danvers had been induced not to throw many difficulties in the way when Millicent began to look after her people herself.

"Everybody was doing it now," Mrs. Gordon said quietly. "Everybody that went with the times, at least, and it would never do for Millicent, in her position, to be behind the world; and so much freedom of thought and of action was allowed to ladies, even young ones, that there was nothing in the least *outré* in the line of conduct Millicent intended to adopt."

Mrs. Danvers felt that the world had altered since she was young, but then she had always followed the stream, and it was only right that Millicent should do so now. There were difficulties with Hammond. He was not a bad man; but he was conservative in his views, and did not approve of throwing away his young lady's money on improvements, for which, he said, nobody would be the better. The people had done very well hitherto, and what was the use of spoiling them?

"You must humor Hammond a little; but let him see that you mean to have your own way," said Mrs. Gordon, "and he will let you have it in the long run."

It was not pleasant work for Millicent. A young lady may easily find more congenial employment than reforming the sanitary regulations of a village. If it had only been a question of clean blinds and flowerpots in the windows, and tidy front gardens, her task would have been much easier, and there would have been a great deal more to show for the trouble and money expended. And her people themselves were thankless and careless, and that disheartened Millicent the most; they might surely be thankful to her for undertaking all this wretched, distasteful work. They might know that it could never be for her own pleasure that she meddled with drainage and pigsties, with pulling down old cottages and building new ones, and adding extra bedrooms where circumstances permitted, and setting her veto against lodgers being taken into such bedrooms. Mrs. Danvers took the matter as philosophically as she always did the troubles of other people. "It was the way of the lower class; it was folly to expect gratitude from them." Mrs. Gordon, who thought the lower class were pretty well of the same flesh and blood as the higher, and who had gone through the same ordeal herself, told Millicent to be patient.

"These people have to be educated into the decency that to us, with the surroundings we have had from birth, seems a born instinct; and it is very late in the day, remember, for some of them to acquire a new accomplishment. As to the drainage question, and other matters connected therewith, you can't wonder at their thinking you carry matters with a needlessly high hand, when they have been led to ascribe every attack of fever or cholera in their homes to a visitation of Providence, instead of to the open sewer, called a ditch, which every summer but this has been filling all Radley

with its fragrance; or to the other nuisances they have let accumulate under their very cottage windows."

Polly took a very lofty view of the matter, but it cheered Millicent as much as Mrs. Gordon's more practical one. "You are doing right, let what will come of it, and I think that feeling is reward enough, even if you never have any other."

As to Mr. Tilburne, he heard of Millicent's doings, and did not know whether to admire or disapprove of them; but, on the whole, felt that it was just as well she had, after due consideration, said "no" to his offer, and made up his mind not to repeat it. Such fancies looked singular, and were certainly not economical; and then he very prudently married a young lady whose milliner's bills, in the first twelvemonth, came to as much as Millicent's cottages cost her from first to last.

Mrs. Gordon was looking now over some plans and estimates of certain alterations in the village schoolroom which Millicent had submitted to her; but her heart was not altogether in her work, to judge by her eyes, which were wandering away over the garden outside. It was an old-fashioned garden, and Mrs. Gordon had kept it so. Full of old-world flowers, with names whose sound is poetry; and this garden had been her great delight and resource in the troubles of her married life and the privations of the earlier days of her widowhood. She had worked in it with her own hands, taking pride in the flowers she had reared when it had seemed as if she could never more take pride in anything. But even that delight in her garden her son had turned to bitterness. She had of late years studied Millicent's likings in its arrangements. There were roses she had had planted because Millicent had admired them, and a whole lawn had been given up to the bedding plan to please Millicent.

She would never walk round that garden as its mistress now, but instead, sooner or later, that woman who had led her son to ruin would flaunt in her place, and the Holmes would be dishonored by its next mistress as it had been by its last master. To think how she had striven and spared to keep those gardens bright and trim, and all that a dishonored woman might reign in them.

The door was opened, and the footman announced Mr. Tynsdell; and Mrs. Gordon's face brightened up as she advanced to meet him. "I didn't expect to see you so soon," she said, and the dark shadow that now, whenever her face was at rest, dwelt on it passed away for the moment. "I thought you would not be able to leave your patients so easily."

Gordon Tynsdell shook his head with comic gravity. "The patients won't come, and I am tired of waiting for them. I think I shall throw up housekeeping, and my housekeeper too—that is, if she will let me—and look for another ship."

"I'm not sorry to hear it—at least, not sorry that you have not succeeded in establishing a practice in London. I did not care to tell you more when I wrote than that I wanted to see you at your earliest leisure, for before I made you the proposal I am now about to make, I wanted to see how things were with you; and as they are not altogether so flourishing as you expected, perhaps you will listen to it more favorably. What do you say to becoming a country doc-

tor, and settling down here at once? The one medical man, who has attended everybody for miles round, is about to retire. I don't say he has made his fortune, but he has had such an addition to it left him that he is able to give up practice. I should like to see you in his place. His house was in Clayfield, the most populous of the villages about here; and you could buy the lease of that and the furniture (which will do for a bachelor) and the practice for a few hundreds; and if you haven't got them," she went on hurriedly, "let me lend them to you. I want you near me, Gordon."

She laid her hand on his as she spoke, and looked on him almost beseechingly. It was as if she were asking him to be her son in the place of the one she had lost; he always seemed so lost to her; there was something so much wider than the grave between them.

"I should like it well enough," said Gordon Tynsdell, with a little hesitation, "but I am already so much indebted to you—and I don't see—"

"You don't see how you'll repay me," she said; "that would be a very easy thing in a few years. The practice isn't large, but it's good, and I think might be extended. Clayfield is not a very lively spot, but it's pleasanter than the east of London; and—and—if you only wouldn't think of the money—I am rich now," she said, bitterly; "now that I have no one to get money together for, my income accumulates. I took it all, as you know, to meet the liabilities of the estate, for years, and set it free for him. There is no need to do that now; it is free for him to enjoy—if he can."

"I think you brood too much," said Gordon, "over what is irretrievable. Wretched and miserable as matters are, don't you make the worst of them?"

"I can't help brooding," she cried, passionately. "I can't get away from my thoughts, or only for a little time, and then to find them pressing on me closer than ever. Whichever way I turn, whichever way I look, I meet with something to remind me of the hopes I had raised, of the sacrifices I had made, and all for nothing. Just when you came I was looking at that garden, and thinking how I had hoped to see Millicent Pembury there, and by and by her children. Now, the chances are that no child will ever call Millicent mother; and, instead of a good, gentle girl, who would have done him honor, and made his home what it should have been, he will bring a woman who will be virtually an outcast, who will make him live his life apart from his friends, and cause the Holmes, which I had hoped to see take its rightful place once again, to be shunned and avoided as an unclean place. And she comes, too, between him and me! If my son had only died, what would that separation be to this? Oh! how I envy those who have nothing worse than death to mourn for! Widows who can speak of their dead husbands with love and pride to their children; mothers whose sons have scarcely ever given them a grief till they were taken from them. And such women think they are most wretched!" she added, bitterly, her whole face quivering with pain, and the tearless eyes with which she looked on the garden as if she saw the fallen woman of whom she spoke moving there, telling of greater anguish than if they had been drowned in tears.

Presently she turned to him with a face that she had forced into

composure.—"It is rather selfish to bring you here and talk of nothing but my own troubles: let us put them aside, and discuss this plan of mine for you. If it would satisfy your ambition—if you could settle down, for a time at least, into a country doctor, it would be an inexpressible comfort to me, and I think you might make a fair income—so good an income, indeed, that you need have no scruples about becoming my debtor for the amount required. Now, let us go into the figures of the thing. I have had a talk with Dr. Gardner, who has given me this list of patients, and a rough estimate of his profits for the last three years. Let us look both over, and see what we can make of them."

For the next few minutes Mrs. Gordon was as business-like a woman as if she had kept a ledger all her life, and was discussing the probabilities of Dr. Gardner's successor raising the value of his practice from five to eight or nine hundred a-year, when the door opened again, and Millicent and Polly were ushered in. They had walked over, for the two houses were not a mile apart, and there was a short way from the grounds of one to those of the other which Millicent had again resumed her right of using. Gordon Tynsdell turned round, and in a moment recognized the bright face, the lithe, slender figure, the elastic step, which had charmed him in the girl whom he had escorted through the rain some month's back. He was very pleased—so pleased, that his whole face brightened up, and he came toward her with extended hand.

"No introduction seems necessary here," said Mrs. Gordon.

"I'm not sure of that," said Gordon Tynsdell. "Though I have spent an hour or two in this young lady's society, and had the honor of protecting her from the rain, I had no opportunity of hearing her name, and I am not sure that she knows me by any other than 'the Doctor.'"

Polly gave a brief little account of their meeting, blushing a little as she did so. Gordon Tynsdell thought the gaslight had hardly done her justice; she looked even prettier to-day than she had done then, and he felt that Hertfordshire had another inducement beside the practice at Clayfield to offer him. There could be no question now of continuing the business conversation which Mrs. Gordon and he had commenced, but instead, he found himself presently walking by Polly's side in the garden, while Millicent and Mrs. Gordon were together discussing some fresh obstacle which Hammond had thrown in the way of the projected improvements in the school-house. They were all going to the fernery together, but from the fernery they wandered again into the garden, and Millicent had not yet finished her recital of her difficulties with Hammond, who was stupidly impracticable, as servants of his class so often are. Even honesty has its price, or, rather, indemnifies itself for its devotion to its employers in obstinacy and ill temper,

"And how do you like Hertfordshire?" said Mr. Tynsdell to his companion, when they had both remarked on the beauty of the day and the crocuses, and he wanted to get her to talk, but hardly knew how. She had seemed so much more at her ease with him when they were under the umbrella together, or waiting beneath the railway arch.

"I like it—at least, I like living here. I am very happy with Miss Pembury," said Polly, and then relapsed into silence.

She had an unusual fit of shyness, and was glad when Mrs. Gordon turned into a wider path, and she found herself and Mr. Tynsdell walking in the same line with Millicent and her. There was no possibility of a *tête-à-tête* now. The talk became general, and Polly was more at her ease, and Gordon Tynsdell was better able to watch her. How fresh and bright she was—how innocent and frank, and yet with such a delicious, piquant self-assertion. Polly, on her side, liked Mr. Tynsdell as much, to say the least, as she had done the first time she saw him; and when they walked away, and Millicent informed her that Mrs. Gordon had told her she was in hopes he would settle in Clayfield as Dr. Gardner's successor, Polly felt her spirits rise considerably, and was too ignorant in such matters—never having had time to study her own sensations—to know the why and wherefore.

And it was settled that night, between Mrs. Gordon and Gordon, that he should take up his quarters in Clayfield as soon as matters could be arranged for his doing so.

CHAPTER XXII.

AMANDA'S VISIT TO POLLY.

AMANDA had written a very affectionate letter to Polly, acquainting her with her anticipated residence in the country, and Polly had written back. There the matter had ended, for the present; Amanda had no wish to take Polly into her confidence too soon, or to let her know how she relied on her to facilitate her admission into Hertfordshire society. "I shall let her see how things really are with me first," she said, "and that it may be worth her while to make herself useful to me."

Accordingly, Amanda waited till Clayfield Hall was in something like order. She had persuaded Uncle Sampson to part with a great deal of the furniture of the house at Hackney, under the plea that it must be painful to him to see so many reminders of "dear Aunt Sampson." She had never seen "dear Aunt Sampson" in her life, and she had a vague idea, from what she had heard of her, that the "dear aunt" would not have been nearly so manageable as the "dear uncle" had proved to be. But she always spoke of her so affectionately, that Mr. Sampson had, by this time, quite forgotten the fact that his niece and his late wife had been perfect strangers to each other. Mr. Sampson himself was not so much affected by the loss of his wife, comfortably as they had got on together, as to be pained by the sight of any articles of furniture associated with her memory; but he thought that as he was about to make a new start in life, he might as well have new furniture. Amanda was allowed to help him choose it, and she took care to do a great deal more than help; and Clayfield Hall, a comfortable, unpretending mansion of the time of George the Second, had its drawing-room filled with buhl cabinets and ebonized chairs, and gilding and china, till even Amanda's heart was satisfied with its splendor. When this was done, and other matters arranged to her liking, she ordered

the new carriage to be got ready, and prepared to drive in state to call on Polly.

There was a grand toilet to be made for the occasion. Amanda had left off her black, and had gone into delicate mauves and blues, which suited her pink and white prettiness admirably. She had the upper housemaid to assist her. On one pretense or another she had weeded out all Uncle Sampson's old servants. Admirably as the cook and she had agreed, still Amanda thought she should do better with a cook of her own choosing. This new housemaid soiled her hands with very little domestic work, but she made an excellent lady's-maid; and now that Amanda was out of mourning, she felt that she required one. But even Uncle Sampson's indulgence would have stopped short of a luxury such as no lady of his acquaintance dreamed of, and Amanda knew better than to ask him for it. But she had her lady's-maid all the same, only under another name; and "being called a housemaid," thought Amanda, "she won't expect my left-off dresses, and so I can send them to Highleigh, to be cut up for the children."

"I don't look like a widow," said Amanda to herself, when her toilet was completed. "I don't think anybody would take me for a day over twenty. Well, there's one thing in being a widow, it gives one a longer lease. I shall be as young at thirty as a single girl at three-and-twenty. But I expect I shall be married long before that. Polly didn't seem to fancy the idea of my marrying again, but that's only nonsense. I can't be expected, at my age, to go on fretting for ever because of her father; and she won't like my being in colors, and as poor Mr. Brooke died last Christmas twelvemonth, I think it's time I left off my black. It's such horrid wear in the summer."

It was a lovely day in the beginning of June, and Amanda enjoyed her drive through the country lanes very much. Not that she cared much for the beauty of the hedgerows, now gay with hawthorn blossoms, or the rich green of the fields ripening fast for the hay harvest. A drive down Regent Street in the dullest season of the year would have been more congenial to her than one at any time through the loveliest country. But the air was pleasant and exhilarating; the sun was not too bright for her lace parasol to keep off his rays sufficiently; and with her silks spread out on the ample seat of the open carriage, and every rustic she passed turning to look at her finery, Amanda felt, and was sure she looked, like a duchess. "And who knows but I might be one," she thought, "with the chances I've got, if it was not for those children? I do hope Polly will have the sense to hold her tongue about them. Men like widows, but they can't bear their having encumbrances."

Polly was alone in the comfortable little sitting-room, which Milly and she laughingly called their office, and where they carried on a great deal of the work connected with the task they had undertaken. Just now, Polly was cutting out lilac print pinafores for the school children to make up. Millicent and she had resolved that their girls should be proficient in needlework, whatever else they might be deficient in. They did not care very much for their knowing the latitude of Timbuctoo nor the history of the Byzantine Empire. But as they were, in all probability, to be first household

servants and then the wives of working men, they should, at least, be well versed in the arts of making, mending, knitting, and darning. The furniture of this room was old, like that of the rest of the house. One of the charms of the Hall, in Polly's eyes, was the delightful mellowness that time had given to all belonging to it, from the elms in the park and the evergreens on the lawn to every chair and table in the house. But Millicent and she had freshened the room up with curtains and chair-covers of rosebud-patterned chintz, and there were water-color paintings of Millicent's on the wall, and flower-stands in each of the windows. And early roses peeped in at those windows, which overlooked the flower-garden, now becoming brighter every day. Altogether it was as pretty and pleasant a work-room as two young women, each bent on making the best of her life, and brightening the lives of others around them, could have had for their own especial sanctum.

Polly was in a pretty black and white piqué morning-dress, with just a knot of scarlet in her hair, and another at her throat. She loved a bit of color dearly, some instinct telling her how it added to her prettiness. Polly was not vain, and it is not vanity which teaches a good and pretty girl to make the utmost of her beauty, so that she shall be a living picture in the house wherein she dwells; so, though Polly had not yet left off her mourning for her father, she had a pleasure in wearing those scarlet knots, which harmonized so well with her rich clear skin and the dark brightness of her hair and eyes.

Amanda looked quite out of keeping with this pretty, simple, old-world room, and the neat little figure, with the large scissors in her small hands, cutting out those homely cotton garments. Her silks were so bright and lustrous, and her bonnet was such a wonderful combination of tulle and flowers, and her hair was so elaborately dressed, that, altogether, she looked as if she had stepped out of a fashion-book of to-day into the bygone life of a century past.

She kissed Polly effusively. Amanda was always ready with her kisses. Then she sat down in the midst of her flounces, and said,—

"Don't stare, Polly. No doubt you think I ought to have come sooner, but I've been so busy getting the place to rights. We *are* to rights, now, and I shall be very glad to see you at the Hall. I suppose Miss Pembury will let you come. How are you getting on with her? She seems to keep you pretty hard at work," glancing at the lilac prints upon the table. "Why, you'll get corns on your hands if you go on cutting-out like that."

"I've got one," said Polly, glancing at a small callosity at the bottom of her right forefinger. "But the cutting-out must be done all the same. The schoolmistress hasn't time for everything, and I promised she should have these pinafores by to-morrow for the children."

"Well, you've come to something! To be cutting out for charity children! I think you're letting Miss Pembury put upon you. However, you know your own business best," added Amanda, discreetly remembering that it did not matter to her in the least whether or not Polly was "put upon" by Miss Pembury, so long as she could

make her useful in the way of society. I daresay you find it answer to humor her a little. What sort of a person is she?"

"Miss Pembury is very sweet and very charming; and I love her with all my heart," answered Polly.

"Ah, well, it's to be hoped she won't tire of you. Ladies do tire sometimes of their companions. But make hay while the sun shines, Polly. Only you won't! You're not like other girls. But the society ought to be good about here, and if she takes you into it, you ought to pick up a husband."

"The society *is* good, in your sense of the word," said Polly. "They're ladies and gentlemen, of course, who visit here, if some of them are not particularly clever or very amusing. But I don't think Miss Pembury engaged me with a view of furthering my matrimonial prospects; and a country gentleman with a good estate wouldn't be likely to think of a paid companion, whose father kept a chemist's shop, as a suitable wife for him."

"Oh! whatever you do, Polly, drop that shop!" cried Amanda. "It can't do you any good to be always bringing it up, and it might do me no end of harm. The position that I might take now Uncle Sampson has bought himself a landed estate!—and now that puts me in mind of something I wanted to speak to you about. Couldn't you get Miss Pembury to call upon me? We're neighbors now, you know, and I've a right to expect, now we're living in Clayfield Hall, to be called on by the County. Don't you think you could manage that for me?"

"I doubt it. I never interfere with matters of that kind. It would be great impertinence."

"I don't see that. There are ways of doing things. You might ask Miss Pembury to call on me as your relation. I've a right to expect to be called on on my own account; but so long as she *did* call, I shouldn't be too particular."

"I would rather not do anything of the kind," said Polly. "Miss Pembury is so very kind, that I would not, for worlds, trespass on her kindness."

Polly did not think it expedient to tell Amanda that she had no wish to introduce her to Miss Pembury as her relation. Amanda's vulgarity, which her fine clothes and her fine-lady airs only heightened, struck her now as it had never done before. But Polly had been living of late in a more refined atmosphere.

"Very well," said Amanda, with a petulant little toss of the head, "I daresay I can do without Miss Pembury—indeed, I only wished it on your account. I thought it might be useful to you to let her see that you had connections quite as well off as herself. And I don't know that Miss Pembury would have suited me." Polly was quite of that opinion. "I hear she's odd—one of those women who think of setting the world to rights. Our clergyman at Clayfield dropped something about her. She'll get herself talked of if she doesn't mind, and she'll never marry—and I don't believe you will either, Polly."

"You've prophesied that a hundred times at least," said Polly, with a laugh.

"Ah, well, we shall see," replied Amanda, with a knowing little nod. "It never does for girls to be peculiar, and different to other

people. Men don't like it; and as to cleverness, I tell you what, Polly, the one thing in the world a man can't forgive in his wife is her being wiser than himself."

Amanda was not such a fool, after all, as Polly sometimes thought her.

"Other people will call if Miss Pembury doesn't," continued Amanda, reverting to her grievance against Polly. "There's the curate—I like him very much, and he's rather High, which is all the fashion just now; and he visits with the best families, and he preaches celibacy—they all do that," said Amanda, shrewdly; "the High Church ones, at least, till they meet with a rich wife! And there's the rector, but I don't care so much for him, and the doctor, Mr. Tynsdell. I do like him amazingly; he called—at least, I didn't feel very well, so I sent for him; I'm sure he's quite an acquisition to the neighborhood."

"Yes, we all think him a great improvement on old Dr. Gardner," said Polly; but the tell-tale color mounted to her cheeks, and Amanda's keen eyes discerned it.

"She's after the doctor herself! That's the girl who never wants to be married! I hate such artfulness!" And Amanda, in her wrath, resolved to punish Polly for keeping, as she imagined, a secret from her. But she said no more about the doctor just then, and talked, instead, of the improvement that Uncle Sampson had made at the Hall, and of her own greatness and glory. It was not Amanda's fault if Polly was not duly impressed by her magnificence; and then she took her leave, kissing Polly once more, and even more affectionately that when she arrived; and, as she went home, she found that the headache, for which she had called in Mr. Tynsdell, was coming on again; and, when she arrived at the Hall, sent round the groom with a note to him. "For there's nothing like taking things in time," said Amanda, as she bathed her forehead with eau de Cologne, "and I *don't* mean that little minx Polly to have the doctor, if I can help it."

CHAPTER XXIII.

CALM SUMMER DAYS.

Gordon Tynsdell had found himself considered an "acquisition" to the neighborhood by others than Mrs. Brooke. Clayfield was the center of a nest of villages, and its doctor had always commanded a good practice, and been in the habit of visiting at the best houses. But Dr. Gardner was elderly and deaf, and even the most conservative of the Hertfordshire squires considered him behind the time. Therefore, the new man—young, and with the stamp of Mrs. Gordon's approval on him—was welcomed into their midst, and Gordon Tynsdell found at once that his surroundings were almost as different as his patients from those he had had at the East-End. His house, too, was a comfortable one—one of those unpretentious yet cozy places one sees so often in our larger villages. Flush with the footpath, a door in the middle, two windows on either side, five above, and then some attics half hidden by the gutters; and at the end, a small place built out with a side-door, on

which "Entrance to the Surgery" was painted, and a long wall, over which apples and pears showed themselves, first in bloom and then in fruit, running above the village street. This had been Dr. Gardner's residence, and Gordon Tynsdell had entered into it, and taken the old-fashioned furniture along with the practice, and found himself looked upon as "the doctor" for a circuit of about twenty miles.

He had not thought it necessary to bring that invaluable "housekeeper and cook," Mrs. Sims, with him, but Mrs. Gordon had found him a comfortable dame to superintend his household, a stout girl to work under her, and a man for his horse and garden, and the establishment was eomplete. She had also, as a labor of love, added to the comforts of his home, by bringing into it various little elegancies and luxuries, which made it almost perfect as the residence of a country bachelor, and which were "not in the bond,"—at least, not in the bond which bound Gordon Tynsdell to pay over to Charles Gardner so many hundreds for the lease and furniture of his house and the goodwill of his practice, etc.

In her double desolation—as a widow whose husband's life had been a greater sorrow than his death, as a mother whose living son was to be mourned over more bitterly than many a buried one—Mrs. Gordon had turned to this, her husband's illegitimate offspring, for comfort and solace. It did her good to have him near her. She had, at first, helped him through a sense of justice, and now an affection, that was almost maternal, had sprung up in her heart for him. He was pleasant and kind—good every way—good to the eyes to look upon; not in the least effeminately handsome, but strong and healthful and frank in appearance, and honest and genial in character. Then, too, he was something for her to lean upon. She had been so much left to herself, that it was an immense relief to have some one near her to whom she could turn, as she would unto a son, and ask for help. Why was he not her son? That seemed so bitter. If a man so false and unworthy as her late husband was to have a good and truthful son, why was he not suffered to be hers as well? Then she would say to herself, "this mother was a better woman than I, inasmuch as she seems to have loved the man who wronged her."

If Mrs. Gordon was hard and stern in her judgment of her husband and her son, she was hardest and sternest in her judgment of herself. She never forget the sin of her youth, in marrying a man for whom she cared so little as, at his best, she had cared for her dead husband. All the suffering of her married life, all the shame and the disappointment her son had brought upon her, seemed only the fitting sequence of that early transgression of her own. It was rare, indeed, for any one to hear her murmur, or even bemoan herself, as Gordon Tynsdell had once done, because just then it had seemed impossible for the grief so sternly hidden not to make some sign. And if life was to be one long penance, as it had seemed of late, why, even of her penance she would try to make the best. She went out of herself—out of her own sorrows, into the sorrows of those around her. No mother ever knew, when she was bemoaning her child taken up to the angels, that Mrs. Gordon, who seemed all tenderness and sympathy for her grief, invied it as one so light

compared to her own. If that living son of hers had only died!—if that dead husband had been but one whom a woman could love and honor! But she had chosen the husband for herself, and the son had but too well resembled the father. And although, at times, her punishment seemed more than she could bear, she felt that she had lost the right to murmur at it.

But she was not wholly miserable, after all. Happiness, like other good things, comes to us sometimes when we are least looking for it. When she first heard of her son's perfidy, it seemed to Mrs. Gordon as if she could never smile again—as if the burden of her life was too heavy for it to be borne any more. But she could not lay it down; there were so many little duties to be fulfilled, that they made the one great duty of enduring to the end easier to be performed; there were so many cares for others, that her own especial care was put, perforce, into the background. And it was not only her own village world,—the old people who owed so many of their comforts to her kindly forethought, the children growing up in her schools, and looking to her praise for their reward, the mothers into whose sorrows and anxieties she entered,—but there was a greater world without, where so much was going on, into which such a woman as herself could enter and sympathize. It was impossible that a life so useful, so full of unselfish thought and energy, could be a very unhappy one, though the shadow of a great remorse hung over her past, and the cloud of a great grief and humiliation over her present.

Into Millicent's life, too, had come the blessedness of work. It seemed as if her sorrow had come to her and found her a girl dreaming only of her own happiness and that of one other, for whom she was content to live, in whose existence she had been ready to merge her own, and this beautiful dream of an earthly Paradise had been dispelled; her demi-god, with whom she had looked to share it, had proved himself of the very poorest clay, and she had found herself lonely, desolate, abandoned—with nothing, as it at first seemed, to live for but to fulfill the humdrum routine of a dull and aimless life. Strength had come to her too, the strength that comes from unselfishness, and the resolve that, if life is not to be lived happily, it shall, at least, be lived worthily. "Blessed is the man who has found his work and does it," said Carlyle. In this our day a great many women like Millicent Pembury are echoing that sentence, and carrying it out to the full.

Into Polly's life this was the happiest summer that had ever come. She had grown to love Millicent Pembury as dearly as one girl can love another. It was a half-protecting love, with more of the mother than the sister in it, for Millicent was still accustomed to lean on and be guided by her, saying, sometimes half in jest, half in pitiful earnest,—"I shall never be quite able to walk alone, Polly." It had grown to be Polly with her now, just as it was with all who knew Miss Brooke well enough to see how well that designation suited her. They were just two girls together, giving very little thought to the fact that one was a rich heiress, the other her paid companion, with nothing but her yearly salary to depend on. And Polly, who was happiest when she was busiest, had ample employment for both hands and head, in helping Millicent reform

the little world which had been given to her care, and taking care that the roughest and most disagreeable part of the work—for setting any world to rights, whether large or small, is by no means an easy task—should fall to her own lot.

There was something beside at the root of this wonderful happiness of Polly's, though as yet she could hardly own it to herself, and this was the society of Gordon Tynsdell. She saw a great deal of him this summer. He had had the good fortune to please Mrs. Danvers, and of late Mrs. Danvers had not been at all well. Her iron constitution—for it had really been something like it—seemed at last to be giving way, and she had little touches of debility and small pains and aches which were quite unusual to her. Mr. Tynsdell understood her, she said. She had been prepared to like him on Mrs. Gordon's account, but she now liked him on his own. She was ailing in a small way month after month, and, never having been accustomed to illness, was greatly alarmed when it came, and insisted on Mr. Tynsdell's calling at least three times a week.

Being occupied so much with her own ailments, she had less time to lecture Millicent on the innovations she was making in the village, which otherwise even Mrs. Gordon's sanction might not have induced her to condone. And these small ailments made her take a great fancy to Polly, who proved herself a much better nurse than even the invaluable Rutt, and was able to do what Rutt certainly could not—read with fluency and clearness for the hour together. Mrs. Danvers congratulated herself on those admirable tactics of hers which made her avoid quarreling with any one, and never behaving with unlady-like precipitation in any circumstances whatever. If she had only yielded to her first impressions of Miss Brooke, and insisted on Millicent sending her away, she would have lost services that now were invaluable. Miss Brooke had improved immensely—she had acquired some idea of her proper position, and really fitted herself to it with a great deal of tact. The truth was, that Polly's angles, if she had any, rounded themselves off wonderfully when she adopted the *rôle* of nurse. Mrs. Danvers, weak, ailing, low-spirited, and dependent on her good offices, was altogether a different person from Mrs. Danvers, self-sufficing, disagreeable, petrifying, and dignified. Polly could not help liking any one who was dependent on her, and therefore she was now doing what, a few months back, would have seemed impossible—honestly liking Mrs. Danvers.

So it happened that the young doctor and the young nurse saw a great deal of each other, and that thus the liking, which had begun in that walk through the rain to Hackney Station, was cemented. Then, too, Gordon Tynsdell was of use to Millicent in many ways. His name was a tower of strength in her conflicts with Hammond, and she made use of it, too, in dealing with some of her people, who were quite as much opposed to new ways as the steward. And when all else failed, the "doctor" himself was brought on the scene, and a few good tempered words from him would sometimes settle matters more happily than Polly's reasonings, or even Millicent's authority. Then, again, the "doctor" had his troubles, and he was very glad of a little feminine help and sympathy. The Hertfordshire squires were as opposed to progress as squires are in general—perhaps more so; and popular as the new doctor had been,

at first, on his own account and Mrs. Gordon's, and ready as they were to make use of the last new lights in medicine, when sanctioned by great names, in their own families, they did not like these new lights to be made too common. They were not disposed, even at the doctor's most urgent solicitations, to do as was being done in Radley, give their people decent dwellings; and consequently, the doctor, if he had a fair share of paying patients, had a very large share who would never pay at all, and a much larger share than he would have had if the squires had not taken such a persistent delight, as it seemed, in letting those "dispensations of Providence," fever and cholera, have their own way unchecked. But the doctor was young and hopeful, and his young sympathizers at the Hall were hopeful too, and the squires would surely yield when they saw how well things were going on at Radley; and meanwhile, it being the bright summer-time, who shall blame him that, as it was

"... the time of roses,
He plucked them as he passed."

Somebody else was plucking them with him. Polly's path seemed strewn with flowers, that delicious summer-time. What it was that made each day one long delight, she could not tell. Was it the air? the pleasant country sights and sounds, the beautiful old house in which she lived, and the pleasant, well-ordered, busy life? Or was it this dear new friend, so sweet and so generous, so gracious and so good, of whom she was so fond? Polly did not know, but she went about running over with happiness, which showed itself in her voice, and her eyes, and her step. And happiness agreed with her, and made her sweeter and prettier, and brighter. But the cause of this happiness Polly knew nothing of, as yet; she liked Gordon Tynsdell, and it was very clear that he liked her, but, as yet, it had not entered into Polly's thoughts to ask herself whether this liking would turn to anything more, or where was to be the end of all this pleasant, bright intercourse of theirs. Until one day, when her eyes were opened to the real nature of all this new-found joy, and then the joy took wings to itself and flew away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AMANDA'S LITTLE PLANS.

Clayfield, like many other villages, consisted of one street, with laborers' cottages and gardens on either side vain with the blacksmith's or the wheelwright's shop. But Clayfield Street was distinguished from other village streets in having the doctor's residence, of which I have spoken, at one end, while in its very midst was the mansion of its Squire. Clayfield Hall lay back only a little way from its humbler compeers, fenced in by tall iron palisades, with an imposing gate in the center, and between the house and the road there was only a broad carriage sweep round a small grass lawn, so that whatever village life might be going on, Amanda was able to enjoy from her windows. The house itself was built much in the same style as the doctor's, but on a far larger scale. The stables and outbuildings were on one side, and the gardens extended to some

distance in the rear. Altogether, it was a snug little domain, and very much more to Mr. Sampson's taste than if it had been buried in acres of park, or he had had to drive half-a-mile through his grounds to his lodge-gate. He liked to feel himself the great man of his village, and he liked to be near enough to his village to realize his greatness. He farmed a little, and, of course, lost money by it, which, being a sensible man, he had expected to do from the first. But it was right for a country gentleman to grow his own mutton and make his own hay, and a country gentleman Uncle Sampson meant to be. He had a head gardener, who made a good thing of the garden, and kept his master in excellent order; and he had orchard-houses, and a fernery and vineries, and a conservatory and two greenhouses, not because he cared at all for flowers, but because his City friends considered their cultivation, in a certain expensive and elaborate manner, one of the outward signs and manifestations that a man should make of his wealth when that wealth has reached a certain number of thousands.

Clayfield Hall had always held its own amongst the lesser gentry of the county, and Mr. Sampson found himself very well received by most of his neighbors. He was very hospitable, and his wine and his dinners were both good; and he subscribed freely to the Hunt, though he never mounted a horse himself; and his political opinions were those of most of his neighbors, who, it happened, were, like many Hertfordshire squires, Conservative to the backbone. If he had had any talent whatever but that especial one of making money, they might not have got on so well with him as they did; but as it was, Mr. Sampson, not being likely to put them to shame by his own superior intellectuality, they agreed in voting him a very good fellow, and admitted him on sufferance to their ranks, feeling that they practiced a little amiable condescension in doing so, and forgave the manner in which he had made his money for the sake of the good use he put it to when made.

But Amanda, after the first, was not so pleased with her new surroundings as her uncle was. She did not like the ladies amongst whom she found herself, and (women, even if not very clever ones, which, perhaps, none of these were, being keener-sighted than men where other women are concerned) they did not like her. They said that she was vulgar and over-dressed. There might have been a little envy in the last assertion, for Amanda's toilets were really good and tasteful, but they were right in the first. Amanda was on her guard with them, too, and never, when in company, indulged in the colloquialisms with which she favored Polly. But still she was not a lady, and these other women had sufficient wit to find that out, and make the most of the offense. Then, too, Amanda was so undeniably pretty, and, they had a suspicion, was by no means so silly as she seemed; and to some extent they were right, for, so far as her own small interests were concerned, Amanda was certainly not a fool. And most women, especially if with a limited horizon, and still more limited culture, find it hard to forgive the possession in another of superior intellect or cleverness. So Amanda did not feel at home with them. The gentlemen admired her, and made no secret of their doing so. Perhaps the ladies would have liked her better if they had been more reticent in their admiration

of the new-comer. But 'there was no good to be got out of any of them,' according to Amanda. They were not marrying men, being most of them married already; and their sons, if they had any, were either in the nursery or at school, or otherwise away from home. There was a great dearth of eligible bachelors in that part of Hertfordshire. There was Mr. Tilburne, of the Roydons, it was true, and Amanda had spread her nets very cleverly for him, but had spread them in vain. Mr. Tilburne thought her exceedingly pretty, and had let her know as much; but he simply required absolute perfection in a wife, and Amanda did not come up to his standard. Not all her prettiness, not all the wealth that everybody said she must inherit from her uncle, would atone, in Mr. Tilburne's eyes, for the fact that her uncle, her only connection of whom anything was known, had been in business, and that Amanda herself was believed to be the widow of some obscure medical practitioner in London. Amanda had contrived to 'drop the shop,' as she had besought Polly to do; but whether her husband had been a chemist, or a medical man of whom nothing was known but the fact that he had been the husband of Mrs. Brooke for a short time of his existence, mattered very little to this Hertfordshire squire, with his long descent from eight or nine generations of nobodies.

No, Amanda looked round and found all barren, and then she bethought herself again of the good-looking and pleasant doctor at whose name Polly had blushed—positively blushed, and who was such a near neighbor of her own. She had called him in to that headache of hers, which had come on so suddenly after her visit to the Hall; but, after that, people had dropped in, and there had been a little time when she had imagined that Mr. Tilburne was not impervious to her attractions; and so, not even for the pleasure of vexing Polly, had it seemed worth while to trouble herself much about Mr. Tynsdell. But she saw, now, that nothing was to be gained from the various gentlemen who had made her uncle's acquaintance, and Mr. Tilburne was said to be engaged to Miss Crecy (whom he afterward married), and the young doctor was so near, and so much in her way. She saw him every Sunday at church, when his patients suffered him to go there; and when she took her walks in the village, in one or other of those pretty costumes, which made half her neighbors—the feminine half—wild with envy, he would either be driving or walking through, or coming out at the door of one of the cottages, or standing at his own, and in any case there would be the exchange of a good-day, or a bow, or a smile, and Amanda would go home, feeling very well satisfied with herself for that day, at least.

Mr. Tynsdell was ten times better-looking than Mr. Tilburne, pleasanter, and better-mannered. Mr. Tilburne was proud—oh! insufferably proud—she was sure of that, and with not so much to be proud of, after all—just a country squire, with nothing but his few farms and his old house to be proud of. Mr. Tynsdell was only a doctor, it was true; but if she married him, Uncle Sampson would be sure to do something for them, and they might go and live in town, in one of the West-End squares; and he would get a first-class practice, for there was no mistake about Mr. Tynsdell's

being clever—every one said that. He might be called in to attend one or other of the Royal Family, and by-and-by have a baronetcy. There were all sorts of things possible to a clever man, with money enough to wait his time.

Amanda thought all this very seriously over. She really could think, though she always did her best to persuade people that she never did anything of the kind; and the result of her meditations was a firm resolve to marry Gordon Tynsdell, if possible. She had meant to do better things, when she first came to that part of the world, than marry a country doctor, but if she did marry Mr. Tynsdell, he should not be a country doctor very long, and there being no higher game in the way, and having resolved to hunt down this especial game, Amanda set herself to follow the chase in earnest.

Gordon Tynsdell found that the people at Clayfield Hall were likely to be excellent patients. Amanda had a great many headaches that summer—perhaps it was the hot weather; and when the haymaking was about, and she caught a cold, she insisted to Uncle Sampson that she had the hay-fever, and Mr. Tynsdell was sent for accordingly, and found that unless he chose to be considered unduly neglectful to his patients, he would be expected to pay half-a-dozen visits at the least. Then one or other of the servants had small ailments, and Amanda seemed bent on proving herself an excellent mistress, for they were placed under Mr. Tynsdell's care at once. And let him visit whom he might, Amanda was always in the way to receive instructions and answer inquiries. Gordon Tynsdell was a clever man, but it takes a cleverer man than he to be a match for a cunning woman, and he failed to see the true reason why his visits were in such request. Mrs. Brooke was a pretty, silly little woman, and she amused him, and he had no objection to be amused. And it never occurred to him that she should think of him in any light but as her medical man, or as a neighbor who made the dullness of the country more endurable than it would otherwise have been. He had not the slightest idea of falling in love with her—perhaps because he had rather more than an idea that he was very much in love with somebody else. And he had made up his mind that as soon as he felt securely settled in Clayfield, and had cleared off some part of the debt he owed Mrs. Gordon, he would see if he could not bring a wife to share the house which now seemed so inconveniently large for a bachelor.

And Amanda had made up her mind, too, that he should bring home a wife; but that wife was certainly not the person Mr. Tynsdell had selected for himself.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER VISIT FROM AMANDA.

Mrs. Danvers got better toward the end of the summer, and, as she expressed it, was quite her old self, and alive to all that society required of people who occupied the position that her niece and she did. Polly did not find her services, either as nurse or reader, in such constant requisition, and was put back—she hardly knew how,

into "her place," as far as Mrs. Danvers was concerned. Polly was a little amused, and, being mortal, a little piqued, but soon got over the latter feeling, and congratulated herself on having so much more time at her disposal, though perhaps not quite so glad that Mr. Tynsdell now only paid one visit where before he had paid half-a-dozen.

Mrs. Danvers being better, as I have said, she felt herself able to fulfill, and see that Millicent fulfilled, their respective social obligations, and to find fault with the manner in which they had been neglected during her indisposition. During her niece's minority, she had always taken care that The Hall should hold its own in a quiet, lady-like manner in the neighborhood. Dinner-parties, with no gentleman of the family, and the lady a minor, had been, she considered, out of the question; but there had been small dances in the winter, and croquet with high tea in the summer; and altogether, Mrs. Danvers was considered to have acted very judiciously during her niece's minority, and the Hall had done its duty to its neighbors, without at all venturing into undue prominence.

"Now," she said, plaintively, "nothing has been done." She still considered herself entitled to indulge in a little querulousness. "The whole summer has gone by, and the Hall might as well have been shut up and deserted for all that it has done to the neighborhood. You have been sacrificing everything to your whims about that village. Even Mrs. Gordon must think you are carrying matters too far. You might as well turn nun or sister of charity at once."

"But you know, aunt, I couldn't well have people when you are poorly," said Millicent.

"I would have made any sacrifice for your sake, Millicent," said Mrs. Danvers, with dignity, "as I think I have shown often enough; and people must be kept together; and when I undertook to act as your guardian, and, I may say, as your mother, I fully recognized all that was required of me. I should never have thought of allowing my own sufferings to interfere with any due exercise of hospitality on your part, and this summer, now you are of age, and especially after that unhappy affair with Mr. Gordon, you ought to show yourself, and let people see that you are not going to give way."

"I think I have been showing that, as it is," said Millicent, quietly.

But the end of it was that a large garden-party was resolved on, and invitations were sent out far and near. Millicent, who had just settled down into her new grooves, disliked anything that seemed like bringing her back into her old ones, and she went for sympathy to Mrs. Gordon, and did not obtain it.

"Your aunt is quite right," Mrs. Gordon said. "It will never do for a girl of your age to ignore all the claims that her little world has on her. We must remember that our rich neighbors have claims on us as well as our poor ones. I should like to see you give this garden-party as it ought to be given, and I hope you will have a very pretty dress expressly from London for it."

"But you will come, too?" asked Millicent, eagerly.

"Don't ask me," said the other, in a pained voice. "I must

have a little longer time yet, Millicent. Your sorrow may be lived down; there is no shame in it. But he—this man who has sinned against you—is my son; the shame of his misdoings seems to rest on me. I cannot face my neighbors yet; I cannot look a whole crowd of people in the face who know all his miserable story. Some day I shall come amongst them again as I once did, but not yet—not yet."

When Mrs. Danvers heard of Mrs. Gordon's resolution, she said it was only what might have been expected under the circumstances, and, like everything Mrs. Gordon did, showed her good sense and tact. Polly was busy directing invitations, and Mrs. Danvers made interest with the colonel of the —th, then quartered at Ilchester, and he promised the services of the regimental band. The colonel was a cousin of one of her husbands, and she kept up with him as she did with all her connections, and the loan of the band proved, as she triumphantly showed, the policy of doing so. "One never knows when people may be of use," she said to Millicent. "I never drop anybody if I can help it, and I take care to quarrel with no one. Now, Colonel George's wife is a perfectly vulgar woman; her people were something in trade, and half his relations turned the cold shoulder on them both when they married. She had money, but not enough, you know. Still I could not find it in my heart, if only on account of poor Mr. Landon, to throw him over. So I wrote, civilly congratulating him; and about twice a year I send him a short letter, and always conclude with kind regards to his wife. Now you see the good of it all. We shall have the band, and some of the officers, and we sha'n't have Mrs. George, for she is laid up with her sixth or seventh baby. I forget how many there are, and whether they are all boys or all girls, but I know it's one or the other. I must find out from the colonel in the course of conversation."

Gordon Tynsdell received *his* invitation, and then and there he came to the resolution that the day of Miss Pembury's garden-party should be the crowning day of his life. He was just stepping into his phæton to make a long round through the cluster of villages which looked upon him as their chief sanitary authority. He put the note in his waistcoat pocket, for he recognized the handwriting that filled up the printed form; and as he drove through Radley, which he did an hour after, the resolution he had formed was strengthened by the sight of Polly coming through the village. She had a white *piqué* dress, which she had braided herself, and fashioned into a costume which a Regent Street house need not have disdained to send forth, and a coarse Leghorn hat, with a broad black ribbon and a bunch of purple violets in it. But in all matters of millinery and dressmaking Polly was a born artist. Gordon Tynsdell's eyes brightened when he saw her, and brightened still more as she smiled and blushed in answer to his bow. "God bless her!" said the young man, and deep down in his heart there was a wish, which was almost a prayer, that he might be a husband worthy of this good and sweet and pretty girl.

"My little Polly!" he said fondly; he had become familiar enough with her pet name. "What a dear, brave, tender little soul it is! She has had a hard fight of it, I suspect, sometimes,

though just now her lines seem to have fallen in pleasant places. I think she cares for me, or, if she doesn't, I think I can teach her to do so, and I don't believe she would mind an engagement of a year or so. I should like to feel that my goods and chattels were my own before I asked my wife to share them with me. And Mrs. Gordon is one of the best of women, but I don't care to increase my debt, even to her. Besides, she can have none too much for herself. Well, Thursday week will soon be here, and then—and then——"

The doctor's horse stopped at the door of the patient, where three children were lying ill of some infantile disorder, and even his love dreams had to give way to the measles.

When Amanda heard of the *fête* that was to be given at the Hall at Radley, she began to think how she could obtain an invitation to it. Miss Pembury had not called at Clayfield Hall, because, at the time of Amanda's arrival in the neighborhood, Miss Pembury had a great many other things to think of than paying visits of ceremony. Perhaps, as Mrs. Gordon had told her, she should have remembered that her rich neighbors, as well as her poor ones, had claims on her; but she had been so accustomed to leave all such matters to the direction of Mrs. Danvers, that even had she been less occupied with the new duties of her village reforms, it might not have occured to her to call on Mrs. Brooke while her aunt was unable to accompany her. And Polly had said nothing of her connection with the lady of Clayfield Hall. When Amanda had paid her state visit, Mrs. Danvers had been lying down with a bad headache, and Rutt had been bathing her temples with eau de Cologne; Millicent had been in the village hearing those very girls their singing lessons for whom Polly was cutting-out the lilac pinafores; so that the new carriage and high-stepping grays which drew it were wasted for that day as far as Millicent and her aunt were concerned. And Polly had made no mention to Millicent of Amanda's visit. She was a little hurt by the manner in which Amanda had spoken of her father's shop. "If she is ashamed of him, she may be ashamed of me," thought Polly, "and so, perhaps, the less we see of each other the better. I won't force Miss Pembury into an acquaintance that I am sure would be distasteful to her, for it would be forcing to impose on her kindness by asking her to call on Amanda; and as I can't do that, we are better apart. Amanda won't care to have it known that her step-daughter is Miss Pembury's paid companion, when she finds she can make no use of her. I'll write to her now and then. I mustn't lose sight of her on account of the children; besides, poor papa was very fond of her."

Amanda had not even answered Polly's kind little letters. There was no good in doing it, she said, as Polly was so selfish and ill-natured; but there was some good to be made out of Polly now, for she must procure her an invitation to the Hall.

"I shall never be able to look Mr. Tynsdell in the face if I am not there," thought Amanda. "He'll know, of course, that I was not asked; and he's just like other men, sure to think twice as much of a woman if he finds that other people think much of her too. And every one else will know it too. I shall never be thought any-

thing of, or asked anywhere, if I am left out of this. I'll drive over to Polly this very afternoon and tell her that I expect her to get an invitation for me. If she won't do as much as that for her poor dear father's wife, she can't have any decent feeling in her."

Polly was again alone when Amanda called, and she was busy with needlework this time as well as the other. Amanda's eyes took in the loneliness and the occupation too.

"Miss Pembury doesn't seem to give you much of her company," she said, sharply; "she hasn't got tired of you already, has she?"

"No, I don't think she has," said Polly, with a bright, happy smile; "but she is in the village, reading to a sick girl."

"I thought all your girls were taught to read to themselves," said Amanda.

"This one is too ill to do so," said Polly, gravely; "Fanny Gill is dying very fast."

"Fanny Gill! I have heard of her," and Amanda looked very proper; "I wonder Miss Pembury should go there."

"We won't talk of Fanny's shortcomings," said Polly, gravely. "Perhaps if you and I had had no better chance given us than she had, we might have done the same."

"Polly!" Amanda drew herself up in indignant austerity; then wisely remembered that it would not do to be *too* indignant, as she had a favor to ask of Polly. "But you always were so odd," she said, with a little laugh, "and I really think you grow worse. Never mind, I want you to do something for me."

"I thought so as soon as I saw you," said Polly, and made a shrewd guess at the purport of Amanda's visit,

"Well, I'm sure you might have been to see me," said Amanda; "but I dare say Miss Pembury keeps you pretty well to your work."

"Oh, I'm not quite a slave," said Polly.

"No, I've heard that you're like sisters," replied Amanda, thinking that a little flattery might not be amiss; "and, knowing that, I've just driven over to ask you if you couldn't get me an invitation to this garden-party, or *fête*, or whatever it is, on Thursday week. You know it will be so very awkward for me to be left out; quite an affront, for Mrs. Danvers and Miss Pembury ought to have called as soon as I came to the Hall; but knowing that Mrs. Danvers has been ill, and Miss Pembury having such a character for being odd, I shouldn't mind that if an invitation were sent now. It'll be quite an affront if it isn't," continued Amanda, sinking into a pathetic tone; "and I'm sure, if only out of respect to your dear papa's memory, you ought not to let me be subjected to anything of the kind."

"I'll—I'll see what I can do, Amanda," said Polly, a little anxiously; "but you must know that it is a thing in which I have no right to interfere."

"Ah, that might be all very well in most cases," said Amanda; "but, as I said, everybody knows that Miss Pembury and you are just like sisters. Now, do see what you can do for me, that's a dear, and I never forget a good turn. I may be able to do as much for you some day. Is that the dress you're going to wear? Making it yourself too. Well, she does give you time for that, it seems."

"I *do* wish, Amanda," cried Polly, with a little irritation, "that you would not talk of Miss Pembury in that manner. Just as if she was a hard task-mistress, and I her slave! She is just one of the sweetest, best, and most generous creatures living, and I am one of the very happiest girls in existence."

"That's what everybody says, Polly," said Amanda, "that you can do with Miss Pembury exactly as you please; so that I think it will be too bad if you don't get me this invitation. Well, I like your dress. That's the prettiest chintz I've seen for a long time; but I don't think the Dolly Varden style will suit you. It's not so becoming to dark people."

"We shall see when the time comes," said Polly; and something in her tone implied that her dress, at least, should do honor to the occasion. Dolly Vardens were in the height of their bloom that special summer, and Amanda, as she eyed the pretty, flowered chintz and cherry-colored skirt with which Polly meant to adorn herself, resolved to have a dress like it for the occasion. "Only mine shall be a flowered silk instead of chintz, and, the petticoat a pink quilted satin. I'll send to London for it, hat and all, and I'll make Polly look nothing when I come near her."

Then, after asking several questions about the *fête*, and the dress Miss Pembury meant to wear, she kissed Polly again, and took her departure; and she had hardly gone when Millicent came in, looking grave and sad. She had just left Fanny Gill, and the girl was dying fast. The mother had told her so. Fanny's surroundings, now, were more consistent with comfort and decency than they had ever yet been in her short life, but she was dying in consequence of a cold caught soon after the birth of her child.

"And the child will live," said Millicent; "the child, who ought never to have been born to be a burden on Fanny's father and mother, and Fanny herself. Oh, it does seem so dreadful for her to be dying like this, just when I might have helped her to retrieve the past, as far as such a past could be retrieved. And it seems all my fault! The shame that has fallen on this girl—the dreadful waste of her life! Oh, Polly! if, instead of bemoaning my own troubles so selfishly as I did, I had only thought of the sin and the sorrow lying at my very gates——"

"You lost very little time, dear, in doing your best to conquer both the sin and the sorrow," said Polly, kissing her lovingly. Polly's kisses were never lavished like Amanda's, and, therefore, they were all the more precious when they came. "You did not know before, and you could not have done much if you had known. You are only twenty-two now, remember."

"I never should have known if it had not been for you, Polly," said Millicent. "I should have gone on in my own selfish misery, sinning in my own way, as much—oh! more than ever Fanny Gill has done in hers. Oh, it does seem so awful to think of girls like myself leading our careless, easy lives, and to think of all those girls without who have never had a chance of growing up into good and modest women."

"There will not be many girls growing up like that in Radley now," said Polly. "You are working like a heroine in your own little kingdom, like the most amiable and yet the most peremptory

of despots, as I heard somebody say of you;" the "somebody" was Gordon Tynsdell, but Polly was always shy of mentioning his name; "and I should think there was nothing like an autocracy if all autocrats were like you. And now I have a request of my own to make to the lady of the Hall," said Polly, anxious not only to say what she had to say on Amanda's account as soon as possible, and so be rid of an unpleasant task, but to divert Millicent's thoughts from a subject which she could see was distressing her. And then she told her of Amanda's visit, and the errand that had brought her.

"So that was Mrs. Brooke I saw in the open carriage that drove out of the lodge gates as I came in. I thought it was one of Aunt Danvers's many friends, and I was going to ask who it was. Why didn't you tell me, Polly, that it was your mamma-in-law who had come to Clayfield Hall, and I would have called on her."

"I didn't want you to do so on my account," said Polly. "I don't think you would like Amanda; but still, if you could send her a card for Thursday week, it would please her very much, and it isn't pleasant to be left out in the cold."

"Oh, she shall certainly have a card," said Millicent; and Amanda received one the next morning, and wrote off for her dress at once.

"Polly will look like a milk-maid in hers," she said, when she had concluded the letter, "and I should think such a dress as mine ought to settle the matter as far as Mr. Tynsdell is concerned. I wonder whether she really does care for him. Well, I've cut out a good many girls in my time; but I never did think I should have the fun of cutting out Polly."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AMANDA IS VERY BUSY.

THE day of Millicent's garden-party was as bright as if the sun himself was shining in her favor. All the country side had come to do her honor, and the young heiress herself was looking her loveliest, and feeling, for that day at least, as happy as if Horace Gordon had never caused her a heartbreak. Mr. Tilburne was there with his intended. Their engagement was openly talked of now, and Millicent, looking on him, languid and gentlemanly and commonplace, wondered how she could ever have thought it possible that she could spend her life with him. Mrs. Danvers was looking very comfortable and dignified in her invalidism, the traces of which still hung round her, and she had more than ever the air of doing her duty by her niece at any sacrifice to herself. Uncle Sampson came in good time, and he shook hands with Mrs. Danvers, when he was introduced to her, with a cordiality which, she told Millicent afterward, was quite overpowering; and he went round the gardens with Amanda on his arm, very proud to find himself among so many people of good standing, "the best men in the county" as he whispered to Amanda, and very proud of his niece, whom he believed to be the best-dressed and the prettiest woman there.

Amanda, however, did not intend to remain long with her uncle. She withdrew her arm from him, and soon had another cavalier, Willy Tilburne, a cousin of Mr. Tilburne of the Roydons, an Eton school-boy spending part of his holidays with his uncle, and as profoundly ignorant and as perfectly self-possessed as young Etonians generally are. He was very pleased with his post at Amanda's side, and she congratulated herself on having him. "A boy like that can be thrown off as soon as I have done with him, which will be as soon as I see Mr. Tynsdell."

Presently she *did* see Mr. Tynsdell, and Polly was on his arm. Perhaps they were going to play croquet on one lawn, or join the dancers on another. Polly had taken Mr. Tynsdell's arm for some such purpose, but they were walking away now from both, seemingly sufficiently engrossed with each other to need no other amusement. Amanda's heart sank within her.

"Nasty, mean, ugly little creature! That's the girl who always seems to think no man is good enough for her. And Mr. Tynsdell to be so deceitful! I'll get him away from her somehow. Let me see—I'm sure Uncle Sampson's cough was troublesome last night. I almost wish I'd one of the children with me at the Hall; children are always wanting the doctor; but Uncle Sampson wouldn't have liked it, and the child might have been in the way."

That day, or rather that especial hour, was just the golden one of Polly's life. Gordon Tynsdell was looking on her with eyes in which she could read only one meaning. Did he love her? He could never look like that, else. And he was so handsome, and so pleasant, and so genial, and so kind. Every one spoke well of the clever young doctor, who was so tender and yet so strong, so kindly and yet so skillful. Of all happy girls, would she not be the very happiest if indeed he cared for her? Presently they sat down, alone as they thought, and that little nook of the garden was a small Eden for the moment; but Amanda's sharp eyes were watching them, and her companion said softly—"Spoons there, I think."

They talked a little—just the aimless, broken words that so often are all that people find to say when they most desire to shine in the eyes of one another. But if it were possible for Minerva to fall in love, Minerva would not shine in conversation while she was under the influence of the tender passion. They were two very clever young people, and they had plenty of subjects in common, but just then the only things they could find to say were trivialities about the day, and the weather, and the *fête*. Perhaps the sound of their own voices was enough for them, and they hardly took in the meaning of a word they said, or it might be that Gordon Tynsdell was casting about for words that should have very much of meaning in them.

Amanda came toward them. She was determined to separate the two by a *coup de main*, and she almost flung herself on Polly, and kissed her effusively. Gordon Tynsdell was taken by surprise; he was not aware that the two ladies were even acquainted, neither of them having mentioned her relationship to the other. "I have been looking for you everywhere," said Amanda, "and what a lovely day it is. Oh, Mr. Tynsdell, I must have a little talk to you presently about dear Uncle Sampson. His cough last night was

quite distressing. But, Polly, I have something I must tell you about. I'm sure these gentlemen will excuse us." And Polly found herself drawn away from Gordon Tynsdell, and he and the Etonian were left to enjoy each other's society.

He was a little puzzled, and very much vexed. As to the Etonian, if he knew little Latin, and less Greek, and nothing at all of grammatical English, still he was very well acquainted with a great many things with which it might have been as well if he had remained in ignorance. He took in the position at once, and gave Mrs. Brooke credit for her tact in making herself mistress of the situation. Gordon Tynsdell's face amused him. "He's sweet on the little one, but the fair one means to cut her out, and I'd give long odds in her favor."

Meanwhile Amanda, having secured Polly, hastened to tell her why she had done so. "My dear little darlings are not well; I had a letter from Patty this morning, and she says they are sickening for something. Isn't it shocking, and me so far away? I felt as if I *must* tell you, Polly. It's dreadful, isn't it, to be going about like this with such a weight on my mind?"

"But you needn't go about like this," said Polly. "There was nothing, that I see, to prevent your going to the children this morning as soon as you heard they were ill."

"That would be such a dreadful return to dear Uncle Sampson for all his kindness," said Amanda. "You don't consider the duty I owe him."

"To tell you the plain truth, Amanda, I certainly think more of the duty you owe to my father's children."

"It's on their account, Polly, that I study uncle so much," said Amanda, plaintively. "You know he can leave his money just as he pleases, and it would never do for me to offend him. Little treasures! Perhaps I may be able to have them with me before long. It is such a mercy," she added, dropping her voice into a confidential whisper, "that Mr. Tynsdell is so fond of children."

"What difference will that make to you?" asked Polly, quickly.

Amanda smiled and looked mysterious. "That's a little secret between Mr. Tynsdell and me, Polly. There are some things that one does not care to talk about too soon; but you shall be the very first to hear when we can talk about them."

Presently Polly's step-mamma left her, and it seemed as if, in those few minutes, she had taken all the charm and brightness of the day with her. Polly was miserable, hurt, angry, shamed. In all but words, for weeks past, Gordon Tynsdell had told her that he loved her. She was pure, and modest, and womanly in all true womanhood; but still it would have been impossible for any girl, however shy and diffident, to put any construction but one upon Gordon Tynsdell's attentions to her. And if she was to believe Amanda, it was of her he had been thinking all the time. What other mystery could there be between him and her? What other reason could Amanda have for congratulating herself upon his love of children? And she had been played with, befooled, toyed with, just because the young doctor wanted a little amusement on his rounds! But was it true? Could it be true? Might it not be an invention of Amanda's? Then she looked up, and saw Gordon

Tynsdell standing by Amanda's side, a little apart from a group of croquet-players, and she was talking to him in that pretty prattling way she had, which made most men, even if they were as clever as Gordon Tynsdell, think her the most charmingly innocent and infantile of little women; and he was bending over her listening to every word with an interest as great and unmistakable as he had ever shown in words of Polly's.

Ah! greater still! Had he ever bent over her as if he were afraid of losing her slightest utterance? Had he ever spoken as he seemed now to speak, quickly, fiercely, passionately, as if his very life depended on her answer? And Amanda was playing with her parasol, and twisting her lace handkerchief between her fingers, and mincing out the pretty little phrases which he tried to catch as eagerly as if, like the girl in the old fairy tale, she were dropping diamonds and pearls. Diamonds and pearls! They were toads and scorpions those pretty rosy lips were sending forth.

"And so Polly has never told you I was her step-mamma. I took it as a matter-of-course she had, as I knew you were so much at Pembury Hall. Yes, I married poor dear Mr. Brooke when I was a child, scarcely out of pinafores. Polly and I were just like sisters, you know. There's scarcely any difference between our ages. And Mr. Brooke left us both sadly unprovided for. But Polly was always so well able to take care of herself. No fear but what she would fall on her feet. As to me, I don't know what I should have done if dear Uncle Sampson hadn't taken me in charge. I'm sure I never could take care of myself." And there was a little pathetic picture of perfect helplessness and child-like innocency of the ways by which to win through this weary world, that made Gordon Tynsdell think "What a silly little thing it is. It was uncommonly lucky that dear Uncle Sampson did take charge of her."

The "silly little thing" went on,—

"Polly was always so clever and so energetic. Nobody could ever feel any anxiety on her account; and then there's her cousin in India, you know."

"What cousin?" And then there came that fierce, eager look in Gordon Tynsdell's face which Polly had noted with such anxious eyes.

"Hasn't she ever told you? Oh no!" with a little silvery, girlish laugh; "that's not a thing she *would* be likely to speak about. And, perhaps, I ought not to say anything about it either; but I'm the worst in the world for keeping secrets. There, I ought not to have said anything about it now. Please to forget that I've said a word."

"Am I to understand, Mrs. Brooke," and the eager interest in the face, which Polly was watching with such unquiet eyes, deepened; "am I to understand that Miss Brooke is engaged to the cousin of whom you speak?"

"Did I say so? Oh, why did Polly trust her secrets to me? She knows that I never can keep my own; though I don't know, really," said Amanda, putting on a sagely reflective air that would not have disgraced a baby six months old, "that ever I had one in my life. No, I don't say that there *is* an engagement; still, cousins that are only cousins don't look ready to break their hearts at part-

ing, and keep up a constant correspondence, do they, Mr. Tynsdell? Well, never mind. If you don't say a word to Polly, there's no great harm done; and India's the right place for making money; and if he can't come and fetch Polly, why Polly can go out to him. Oh dear! the voyage would kill me. And to go out to be married! Oh! I could never do that; but Polly wouldn't mind in the least. Polly always was, from a child, so perfectly able to take care of herself."

Was this little woman lying, with those guileless eyes, and that pretty rosebud mouth, and those words that were poured out so delicately? Or was the girl on whose truth and loyalty he could have staked his soul an hour ago a desperate, hardened flirt, leading one man on day after day while she was plighted to another? Polly Brooke base, heartless, vile, untrue? If she were so, he would never have faith in woman again!

He couldn't think it! He wouldn't think it! This little creature was making the most of some idle boy and girl nonsense. She did not say there was an engagement, after all. Amanda saw the doubt and hesitation written in his face, and understood it. It wanted but another lie to drive the nail home securely. And Amanda would have told a dozen lies for a much smaller end than she had now in view. "It *is* an engagement," she said, slowly, assuming for the moment an air that was almost grave and matronly; "only Polly doesn't like it to be talked about. They must wait; it wouldn't be prudent to marry yet; and Polly was always such a careful little soul you know."

Careful and clever! No doubt of it! Careful enough to keep her engagement hidden in case a better chance should come in her way, and clever enough to lure him on, and make him think she was that rare prize, a good, true, single-hearted girl, whom he might win, if he pleased, for himself. And then, in confirmation strong of Mrs. Brooke's words, he remembered one morning when he had paid his usual visit to Mrs. Danvers, who was more querulous and restless than usual. Miss Pembury had come into the room, and her aunt, turning to her, had asked, with some irritability, after Miss Brooke. "She has not been near me this morning, and there was that book from Mudie's I wanted her to finish, and at least three letters to write for me. How can I keep up with people, Millicent, if Miss Brooke neglects me in this manner?"

And he remembered very clearly Miss Pembury's answer. Her eyes had brightened, and her lips smiled while she spoke, as if there was some secret between herself and Miss Brooke. "Auntie, Polly has a letter of her own to write, and she wants to finish it in time for the Indian mail. If you remember, she received one from India yesterday."

And Mrs. Danvers had muttered something querulously, to the effect that Miss Brooke should remember her time was not altogether at her own disposal; and Miss Pembury had stopped the sentence before it was completed, by offering to finish the book and write the letters herself, if Polly were not shortly disengaged.

He had never thought of that long Indian letter till now, that its remembrance came as a proof of the truth of Mrs. Brooke's words;

and the girl who had been writing it had come from her task, and shaken hands with him before he left the house, thinking, no doubt, that if the cousin in India did not make money quickly enough, she would make sure of a husband here. She had looked so happy that day. Every little incident of his visit now flashed on his memory. Miss Pembury had asked her if she had finished her letter, and she had smiled her brightest when she said, "Yes,"—smiling to think how she was befooling the two wretched fellows who had trusted in her!

And there was just one little, tiny grain of truth in all this bushel of falsehood. Polly *had* a cousin in India, several years older than herself; and they had been very fond of each other in big brother and little sister fashion. He had left England five years ago, and Polly had cried a great deal at the parting; and cousin Tom's own eyes had not been quite dry, and he had kissed Polly very affectionately when he went away; and Polly, in all simplicity, had kissed him back; and they had promised to correspond regularly. But Polly had never looked upon her cousin as her lover, and to him she had only been one of the sagest and sweetest of little sisters; and this very letter, from the writing of which she had come with sparkling eyes and smiling face, as if from the execution of a task which was a pleasure, had been one of congratulation on his approaching marriage. Millicent knew all about cousin Tom, and Polly had read to her the letter she had received from him, in which he announced his engagement to the sister of an old friend. "And dear old Tom will have somebody to look after him, now; and I shall feel when he brings her to England, which he talks of doing in a year or two, as if he had given me a new sister." And it was the warm sympathy and the innocent happiness of the two girls that Gordon Tynsdell was misinterpreting to his own misery.

Amanda kept him by her side for the next hour or two. It was less trouble being with her than with any one else. She chatted and prattled, and did not care if he kept silent; and after a while he went away, saying he had some patients to attend. Then Amanda went in search of Polly. A girl may feel that her heart is crushed within her, and that all the joy, and the sweetness, and glow has gone out of her life, and yet she cannot sit down and bemoan her lot before two or three hundred people. Neither can she hurry away, like a stricken deer, when the duties of her position require that she should keep a smiling face, and mix with a crowd of gay people, for the especial purpose of making herself agreeable. Besides, Polly was a brave little creature, and she would rather have died than have disgraced herself by any display of weakness. Amanda found her looking rather pale, but she was talking pleasantly enough to some old lady, who had seemed to be rather left out in the cold. Even in this, which seemed the very crisis of her life, when she was dazed and shamed with the misery that had come upon her, Polly's instinctive kindness did not desert her. Presently the old lady saw her daughters in the distance, and went toward them, thinking Miss Brooke one of the pleasantest and best-mannered girls she had ever met with. Then Amanda felt secure of her victim.

"You look dreadfully pale, Polly. I dare say that old lady has

bored you. I feel bored too. Mr. Tynsdell has gone to some patients. And it's very dull for me now, isn't it?"

"I should think, Amanda, if your children are as ill as you say, you would feel something worse than dull; or does Mr. Tynsdell make amends for all?"

"Polly, you're ill-natured, and remind me of my troubles. You might let me have just this one happy day. I'm sure happy days are not so plentiful with me. You don't know how dreadfully I've been fretting about those dear lambs."

"Is Mr. Tynsdell aware of their existence?" asked Polly sharply.

"Between ourselves, Polly, he is," said Amanda, who, now she had begun to tell stories, felt quite disposed to go on. "But we say nothing about it at present—I mean about the children or anything else." Amanda felt she was rather vague in her pronouns, but grammar mattered little so long as Polly understood her meaning. "People are so ill-natured and curious, and they wouldn't understand that I am consulting my children's best interests in devoting myself to Uncle Sampson. And so Mr. Tynsdell and I have agreed to say nothing about the children—nor—nor about anything else. We want it all kept quiet for the present. Nothing will take place just yet. Besides, I think it is only due to your poor father's memory that I should remain unmarried for two years after my bereavement."

"I'm sure my poor father would feel flattered, Amanda, if he could only hear you," said Polly. "And I must say you've borne your bereavement wonderfully well. I'm sure I wish you joy—and Mr. Tynsdell too."

There was a slight dash of contempt in her tone as she looked on Amanda, and thought of how little joy any man would have in her. If, indeed, she had wished to punish Gordon Tynsdell for his treachery to her, could she have chosen a worse fate for him than the one he had selected for himself?

CHAPTER XXVII

SUSAN'S LETTER.

WHAT an unutterable relief it was to Polly when that long day, with its crowd and its music, was over, and she could shut herself up in her own room with her misery. But the misery was not the worst part of it. She felt as if she could have borne her sufferings better if they had come in any other form. If Gordon Tynsdell had only died, so long as she had known him true, and loyal, and worthy of her love, that would have seemed so small a thing to this. He would still have been her very own, her hero above all others, her saint in heaven, as he had been her prince on earth. Till now it had never seemed as if she had known how much she cared for him, how happy she had been in the thought of his caring for her. And she felt shamed in her own eyes. She had either deceived herself all along, and been a bold, forward girl, taking a man's ordinary attentions as so many declarations of love; or he whom she had thought worthy of her love had proved himself to be that mean,

heartless thing—a male flirt. He had been amusing himself with her, while wooing Amanda in earnest.

"I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen him with my own eyes; but to let himself be carried off, taken possession of by her—and what he *must* be to let Amanda claim him!"

She felt shamed for herself, but she felt ashamed for Gordon Tynsdell too. That he could stoop to so poor a thing as she knew her father's widow to be! That Amanda should have eclipsed her was humiliation enough on her own account, but what could Gordon Tynsdell be to set Amanda in her place?

"I suppose it's her prettiness does it," she cried, looking sorrowfully in the glass at her own tear-stained face; "and she is very, very pretty, there's no denying that. But did I ever think that beauty alone would satisfy such a man as I thought him to be? Well, it satisfied my poor father for a time. Amanda won him with nothing but her face, and she is prettier now than she was then! And I wonder how long it will be before he finds, as did poor papa, that the prettiest doll in the world is not worth much as a wife!"

But the contemplation of Gordon Tynsdell's future misery did not lessen her own present sufferings. It was no use shutting her eyes to the fact that she had learned to love him very dearly, and to feel a happy security in his love. That she had let her mind dwell upon her future as his wife; that she had pictured herself sharing his home, helping him, working with him and for him; that she had thought of him as never, never more could she think of any man again. And he did not care for her; he never had cared for her, or only with such an idle, careless liking as he might give to any girl that came in his way. What a dreadful, awful mistake. What a humiliation! She was shamed in her own eyes. And to be put aside for such a one as Amanda!

Polly had little sleep that night, and she arose in the morning, pale, heavy-eyed, and unrefreshed. What a different world it was to what it had seemed four-and-twenty hours before!

"And it has to be lived in all the same," moaned Polly. "Has to be lived in," she repeated, passionately; "and I *will* live in it! I could tell Millicent to be strong and brave under her trouble, and not to let her love for one who was not worth it spoil her life. I'll follow the advice I gave her, if I can; only," she added, with a rueful smile, "it's easier sometimes to give counsel than to act on it."

She dressed herself with unusual care that day. "I won't look a love-lorn damsel if I can help it," she said; "and as to being pale, that will only be set down to my exertions yesterday. Oh! I did exert myself! I think that was the hardest day's work of all my life; but there are many such hard days yet to come."

Even Millicent, dearly as she loved her, should not know her secret. "She is as good as a sister; but I could not have told a sister, no, nor a mother, if I had one, such a thing as this," thought Polly. "Oh! to think of my being such a love-sick little fool! I could hate myself for it! Only I must pity myself too. I must have my own pity, for I can ask no one else's."

Millicent had been a little perplexed by what she had seen the

preceding day. She had been very much occupied, but not so much so but that she could see that Mr. Tynsdell was paying very much more attention to Polly's step-mamma than to Polly herself; and for some time past it had seemed to Millicent as if Polly was likely to find her best happiness in marriage, after all And Millicent had been very much pleased at the thought. Polly would always be near her; and, with such a husband as Gordon Tynsdell promised to make, could not be otherwise than happy. Millicent had planned it all out, and dwelt on her friend's future with much satisfaction. And now, how was it that this little Mrs. Brooke, with her mincing ways and childish speech, was to spoil all the picture?

Had they had a quarrel, and had the little widow sought to make her own profit out of it?—Millicent did not like Mrs. Brooke; very few women did; but, then, pretty faces and childish manners don't go so far with women as with their lords—or had Gordon Tynsdell proposed, and had Polly been so perversely bent on carrying out her views of the superiority of a single life to a married one as to refuse him? The bare supposition made Millicent quite angry with her friend. And if Gordon Tynsdell had proposed he had no right to expect a refusal. Polly had not shown her liking for him in any unmaidenly or improper way, but still the fact of her liking him had been sufficiently clear.

Millicent was puzzled and troubled, and she shrank from going to Polly and asking for an explanation. "If she thinks right to tell me anything it will be told," was her thought; "and if not, it will seem as if I were presuming on our respective positions in asking her."

Mrs. Danvers was down late the morning after the *fête*, and she was cross and slightly bilious; and Millicent was watching her friend; and Polly was trying to look careless and at ease, doing her best to laugh and talk, and with a great dread all the time lest she should break down and cry. The breakfast-table, on the whole, would have been rather a dull one had it not been for the arrival of the post-bag, of which Mrs. Danvers still retained the key.

She had offererd to surrender this and several other keys, when Millicent became one-and-twenty; but, just then, Millicent was disposed to shrink from any extra care or responsibility, and she had accordingly requested her aunt to retain them, which Mrs. Danvers, after a little speech about being always ready to make any sacrifice of her leisure on dear Millicent's behalf, consented to do. But, indeed, these keys, which were such as the master or the mistress of the Hall had always had in his or her own keeping, made the music of Mrs. Danvers's life.

"A letter for you, Miss Brooke," she said, glancing at it with a little supercilious surprise. "A petition from one of your *protégées* in the village, I should think—only that it bears the London postmark."

Polly took up the letter. The envelope was pale pink, and not very clean. The handwriting was an angular scrawl, and it was directed to "miss Brooke, the hall, radley, hertfordshire," the only capital being the one that commenced her name. The inside of the letter was in keeping with the envelope. The paper was a pale

blue, lined, and smelling detestably of musk, and it began thus, "dear miss Brooke."

Polly looked at the signature, and, as she had thought at the first glance, saw that her correspondent was Susan.

Susan wrote to say that her mother wished to give up the charge of the baby, though very sorry to part with it; but an uncle of Susan's, in the fried-fish way, wished Mrs Smith to keep house for him, having lately lost his wife. Her sister would go with her mother, but Susan would remain in service "for the present." There was a dash under "*the present*," which was meant to imply that Susan intended shortly to settle in matrimony; the last young man with whom she had kept company having made a formal offer of himself and his weekly earnings of a pound a-week. Susan was at present in service at Kensington, which she preferred very much to Wurtemburg Street, "as being genteeler." Madge had left Mrs. Williams's six weeks after Susan did. The new cook had gone on at her for coming out of the workhus, and Madge wouldn't stand it. But she ought to have remembered that it wasn't everybody, born respectable, that would put up with workhus company as she, Susan, had done. She believed Madge was in a lodging-house, or some place of not much account; but, of course, it wasn't to be expected that she could get into a real good house as Susan had done, and could do again any day. Susan sent her duty to Miss Pembury, and mother would be glad to hear from her about the baby.

Polly handed the letter to Millicent, and Millicent read it, and then gave it back, looking helplessly at her.

"Whatever is to be done with the child?" she said.

Polly laughed—this time a healthy, natural laugh. There was something for her to do—something helpless to be cared for. The trouble that, a little while back, had seemed to be darkening the whole world, cleared off into the background. "I suppose we must bring it down here," she said, "and begin a little farming out on our own account."

"If we could find anybody to take it," said Millicent, doubtfully.

"There are three houses, in any one of which, I should say, it would be welcome for even less money than you pay Mrs. Smith, if that were a consideration," said Polly. "There's Mrs. Steene, whose last son is married, and whose last girl has gone to service. There's old Mrs. Bray, who would be very glad of such an eke out to her little earnings; and there's Mrs. Henderson, whose youngest living child is seven years old, and whose baby died six months ago. In any one of these houses our poor little waif would be looked upon as a godsend. I was going to ask you to apply to the Union for some babies to put in them."

"The workhouse is the proper place for pauper children," said Mrs. Danvers, sententiously. "I *do* hope, Miss Brooke, you won't be putting it into Millicent's head to turn Radley into a nursery for them. I'm sure it was a thousand pities she didn't let this wretched little creature go there at once. It will be a trouble to her all her life most likely, for it's impossible to tell how it may grow up."

"Into a human being, I hope and trust," said Polly; "she

thought of Madge as she spoke—of Madge, who had seemed nothing but a living, breathing machine, with some capacity for work in her, till a baby cry and a baby's fingers had woke the biped soul within to some faint life. Better, a thousand times better, that this little one should have died, than have lived to grow into another Madge, or into such an outcast as the lost thing she had seen her talking to under the railway arch. And then, at the thought of that evening, upon which somehow she had acquired a habit of looking back to as the happiest one in all her life, there came a dull, dead pain. Gordon Tynsdell had passed out of her life. Oh! if she had never seen him! Oh! to have been as senseless and as torpid as another Madge, so as to have escaped this pain! And yet no—no—a thousand times no! Better to suffer, struggle, and endure, so that there was the *power* of suffering, of struggling, and of endurance. Better to have the human heart, although stricken to the death, the human soul, although cushed, and shamed, and humbled to the dust, than to feel as if one had no heart with which to suffer, and no soul with which to bear!

"But we have got to get the baby here," said Millicent, after a pause. "Most practical of Paulines, how is that to be done?"

"Wouldn't the simplest way be for me to fetch it?" asked Polly. "It would be very little trouble on the railway."

"Miss Pembury could hardly allow you to appear in the character of a nursemaid," said Mrs. Danvers, loftily; "but I can't see why some other home, if Millicent persists in her freak of adopting it, shouldn't be found for it in London."

"I would rather have the little one under my own eye," said Millicent, "as Mrs. Smith is about to give up the charge of it. I have a special interest in it, not merely on its own account. I should never have *known* Polly if it had not been for that little creature. We were such perfect strangers till the morning that baby came."

Mrs. Danvers thought it would have been just as well if Miss Pembury never *had* known Miss Brooke. Mrs. Danvers, being now so much better as not to have any great need of Miss Brooke's services.

"But, as aunt says, we musn't turn you into a nursemaid, Polly," continued Millicent. "Mary, the under housemaid, shall go with you. She has had plenty to do with children in her own home, and will be delighted to say she has been in London, if only for an hour, and that at the East-End. And when shall you go?"

"To-morrow, if you can spare me," said Polly, promptly. "And would you like me to go to the village, to make arrangements for its reception, to-day?"

"I will go with you," replied Millicent; "and we will have the pony-chaise, and call and see how Mrs. Gordon is. I promised to let her know how the *fête* went off."

But it was not only on Mrs. Gordon's account that Millicent chose to keep with her friend to day. There was that in Polly's face, when it was at rest, which she had never seen before. She was prompt, thoughtful, energetic, full of resource as usual when appealed to, but the moment she was left to herself, a cloud seemed to come over the face which had hitherto been so sunshiny and spark-

ling. A cloud like that which had settled on Millicent's own such a little time back, and which might have been there still if Polly's hand had not cleared it away.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VERY HARD TO BEAR.

"We will settle about baby first," said Millicent. "Business first always; isn't that your maxim, Polly?"

And Polly smiled, and did her best to look as if nothing ailed her; and still Millicent was not satisfied. The smile was on the lips only. Polly's eyes were dim and grave, as she had never seen them yet. "If she would only tell me—oh! if she would only tell me!" thought Millicent. "How could I ever have gone living on if I had not had her to speak to?"

But baby had to be thought of just then. Millicent knew that Polly would have disdained to speak of any troubles of her own while that weighty piece of business was in hand, and after due consideration, the preference was given to Mrs. Henderson, as being likely to furnish baby with ready-made brothers and sisters, as well as parents. Mrs. Henderson was ready to undertake the charge—indeed, charmed to do so. "She had felt very lonesome since her baby died; there seemed nothing to fill up her time, like. The last child was so well out of hand, going to school regular, and indeed Susy would be glad of a little sister, for she was mopish now there was no baby in the house. It did a girl like that a deal o' good to have a little one to look arter between her school-hours; they liked it better than the best doll you could buy at a fair."

So baby was likely to find a whole set of relatives, and instead of being one of a multitude, fed, clothed, and taught by rule, it would grow up in the warm atmosphere of a household; be kissed and scolded by Mrs. Henderson as she would have kissed and scolded one of her own; whipped, may be, when it grew into whipping age—homely housewives like Mrs. Henderson have great faith in an occasional "spanking;" petted by the girls, who would feel as if they were its sisters; teazed by the boys as if they had the rights of brothers. It would be regarded as if it were a human being instead of an infinitesimal portion of a great mass of pauperism. "There will be just all the difference between its bringing up and what it would have had in the workhouse," said Polly, "that there is in a chicken's being hatched by a clacking, scratching, feathered mamma, and being brought out of the shell by the Egyptian process of the oven."

Polly was quite herself when speaking of baby. Full, too, of concern about Madge. "That girl weighs on my mind. I wrote twice to her after I came here, but I suppose she did not care to write back again. I ought to have looked to her a little more while I was at Mrs. Williams's. But indeed I gave her very little thought till the baby came and woke her up to life. I had so much to do with those children, and poor Mrs. Williams was so glad to have some one about her who was handy at needlework. If it had been at the Hall, where I seem to have time for everything—"

"And I sometimes fancy I am killing you with work," said Millicent.

"*Work* never kills," said Polly; but the brightness left her eyes as she spoke, and there came a look in them which seemed as if she had thought of something surer than work to kill.

Mrs. Gordon was very pleased to hear all they had to tell of the *fête*. "I knew it would be a success," she said, "and it deserved to be. I am very glad, Milly, you have shown your richer neighbors you are aware of your duties to them as well as to your poorer ones."

As to the arrangements for the baby, Mrs. Gordon entered into them with all her heart. But, perhaps, it was not the little waif of whom she thought so much, as she did of the girl upon whose life a blight had fallen so early. Anything to keep her from brooding over that, or from flinging her life away, as she had thought of doing. To have heard Mrs. Gordon's practical questions about all things connected with baby's welfare, and Mrs. Henderson's fitness for her charge, no one could have guessed what a dark shadow lay in the background of her life. And yet that shadow was so great, her sense of shame so keen, that if she had been a selfish woman, wrapped up in her own grief and her own humiliation, she could hardly have gone on living. Polly saw this to-day more keenly than she had ever done. Millicent had taken the lesson of Mrs. Gordon's life to herself long since. Polly felt as if to-day she had only begun to learn it.

Polly thought she was playing her own part admirably. To have heard her talk, it would have seemed as if the baby was paramount with her. And, indeed, she did feel a very great interest in it, but she flagged ever and again; that dead, dull weight at her heart would make itself felt again and yet again. Something was wrong with her, Mrs. Gordon saw. She had grown to be fond of Polly. Affection was always a growth with Mrs. Gordon. She had neither sudden fancies nor intuitive dislikes. And, slowly and deliberately, she had come to like Polly very much; first on Millicent's account, then on her own, and lastly on Gordon Tynsdell's. More and more she had taken him to her heart, in place of the son she had lost, and it had seemed to her that if she had to choose from all the world, she could find no better wife than Pauline Brooke for him. And something was wrong with the girl to-day. Perhaps some home-trouble—poor relations in need or in sickness. Whatever it was, it would be well for Millicent and her to know it, and help her for Gordon's sake. That the trouble should arise from Gordon himself was the last thought that would have occurred to her.

Mrs. Gordon always kissed Millicent when they met and parted. A kiss, with her, meant very much, for she was not childishly profuse with her caresses, as are some. But to-day she drew Polly to her and kissed her too, with the same loving, motherly tenderness she had shown Millicent. Polly felt choking. What did the kiss mean? Was it given her in pity for Gordon's desertion? How she longed—she, the motherless girl, who had never known a mother—to fling herself on Mrs. Gordon's bosom, and moan out her grief.

"You must take care of Polly," said Mrs. Gordon to Millicent, and she gave a look which Polly did not see; "she has been over-

exerting herself, I am afraid. We must not let her go to London, even after baby, till she is better."

But the look, which Millicent perfectly understood, told her that there was something more the matter than over-exertion, and she must learn what it was.

Millicent drove gently on, down a pretty, narrow lane, with the banks growing as high on either side as if they had been in Devon. Through the overhanging branches of the trees the sun's rays came with a softened light, and the pony seemed to think he had a right to wend his way at a leisurely pace, that his mistress and her friend might the better enjoy the soft, still sweetness of the autumn day. Puck was a clever pony, and knew by some instinct how to suit his pace to his driver's mood. He always went at a good pace along the dry, uninteresting high road, but in the village, where every one was on the lookout for Miss Pembury, and bows and greetings had to be exchanged, or in such a lane as this, where blackberry brambles thrust their ripening fruit almost into their laps as the girls drove on, and wild flowers were almost asking to be gathered, Puck went as leisurely as if he liked to show his hearty approval of all the amenities of life, and his sincere admiration of the beauties of nature as shown in a Hertfordshire lane.

But at one point the lane was crossed by another, and, Puck still ambling along at his own pace, the ladies behind him had plenty of time to see two figures coming toward them down this other lane. Mrs. Brooke, in the prettiest of morning walking dresses, with hat, and gloves, and boots, all so perfect that the only fault was they were too elaborate for the country, was slowly pacing the greensward, and by her side walked Gordon Tynsdell, with his eyes bent down on her upturned face.

It was the merest accident that he had met her. He had got up that morning in an evil frame of mind, feeling at odds with the whole world, but especially with Pauline Brooke. He had chosen to walk instead of driving to his patients, partly because his horse would be the better for a rest, and partly because so he hoped to lay the evil spirit that was in him. And he had come across Mrs. Brooke, who was walking off a little headache, and, as their road lay together, and as he had gone his morning round, which happened that day to be a short one, there was no reason that he should hurry on, and leave the lady to continue her walk alone. And, if she looked up in his face, how could he do otherwise than look down, especially when that upturned face was such a pretty one? He was sore, and chafed, and hurt, and the flattery of Amanda's ways and looks was very pleasant to him. She was a silly, simple little thing, in his opinion; but, at least, she was amusing, and would not lead him to expect everything from her only to deceive him,—and that was what Polly had done. He had thought her all that a woman should be, truthful and tender, but firm and helpful; prompt and clever, and yet so sweet and womanly in all her ways. And how she had deceived him! Could he ever trust in woman more? Never, he said, in the bitterness of his soul, unless the woman was as transparent a fool as the one he looked upon.

Puck looked down the lane up which these two were coming, as if to take in the whole situation. Mrs. Brooke smiled sweetly, and

bowed to Miss Pembury, giving Polly afterward the friendliest of nodds. Mr. Tynsdell removed his hat with all due courtesy, and, as the ladies in the pony-chaise bowed, Puck was startled by a flick of the whip, so smart as to send him home at unusual speed. Millicent did not look at her friend, but Puck at once understood what was wanted of him, and in another five minutes his mistress was at her own door.

Both girls ran up-stairs without a word being exchanged. Not one had been uttered since that vision of the fair Amanda had crossed their path. But, as Polly turned into her room, Millicent caught sight of her face, so gray, so joyless, so different from its usual innocent rosy brightness, that it seemed impossible to pass on and leave her. She followed her into the room, and closed the door; then put her arms around her.

"Polly,—what is it? Won't you tell me?"

There was a hard, dry sob, as if the girl were gasping and struggling for breath, and then the words came out painfully,—

"I have nothing to tell, Millicent."

That was the shame of it. This man had made her love him, and yet said no word of love. She was humbled in her own eyes—more angry with herself than with him.

"What is it that is wrong between Mr. Tynsdell and you?" asked Millicent. "How has Mrs. Brooke come between you? What does it all mean?" she persisted.

"It means that I have been a fool—oh! such an utter, utter fool!" cried Polly, passionately, and then, burying her face in her hands, she cried bitterly. "I have thought Mr. Tynsdell cared for me a little—and I have been weak enough to care for him. That's all, Millicent, and I am ashamed to say it."

"We all thought the same as you did," said Millicent, gravely. "Aunt Danvers, Mrs. Gordon, and I. There is some mistake, or misunderstanding, and Mrs. Brooke is connected with it. I don't like your step-mamma, Polly."

"But she will make Mr. Tynsdell like her, and that is more to her purpose," said Polly, forcing her tears back. "Millicent, if ever he did care for me, and I think, from what you say, he must have done so a little—you couldn't all have been deceived—she has won him from me; yes, she has won him," said Polly, with a rueful smile. "Amanda is not so silly as you think. She was always clever enough to get her own way in everything."

"If I could only help you—if I could only comfort you," cried Millicent. She wanted to say a great deal, and could hardly utter a word. Polly had done so much for her—been her very salvation when she was sinking into the slough of despondency—and she could do nothing in return. "If I could only help you," she said again, and the tears were in her eyes.

"You do help me, and you have helped me," said Polly, kissing her; "and I have been very silly; and I don't think Mr. Tynsdell is to blame. We were all in too much of a hurry, and he has changed his mind—that is all. Please, Millicent, we'll say no more about it. I've been very foolish, and I want to forget my folly as soon as possible; and—and—there's the luncheon-bell ringing, dear."

And Polly began folding her gloves and putting away her hat with exemplary care.

"Can you come down, dear?" said Millicent, with tender wistfulness.

She could not comprehend Polly. Her cheeks were burning now, and her eyes were bright, and there was a desperate calmness about her.

"Why not? I shall come down, and I shall eat and drink—somehow. Millicent, if Mrs. Danvers thinks that Mr. Tynsdell was ever glad to come here on my account, I won't have her think that I could lose my luncheon because I have found that he only comes on hers. When one sees that one has been a fool, things won't be better by sitting down to bemoan one's folly."

"You were not to blame. There was only one interpretation that could be put upon Mr. Tynsdell's manner."

"Yes, and that was the wrong one. We've all been making a mistake."

"And it is so hard upon you, dear," said Millicent pitifully.

"Yes, it is hard, but it has to be borne," said Polly; then, after a pause, "I've had a great many hard things to bear in my life, but this seems about the hardest of all."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WURTEMBURG STREET AGAIN.

Mrs. Williams sat in the dingy dining-room at Wurtemburg Street. She was turning one of her old dresses into a frock for one of the children. She had a great deal of such work to do now—very much more than when Polly was with her; for her present nursery-governess—the third in succession since Polly had left—was not very expert at her needle. Poor Mrs. Williams looked worn and harassed with petty cares and small anxieties. Everything was rising—butchers' meat, servants' wages—everything but doctors' fees. The constant struggle to make both ends meet, and to keep up appearances, was telling more and more upon her. But it never occurred to her that in marrying for a livelihood she had chosen the very hardest way of getting one.

She was expecting Polly every minute. It had been arranged that Polly was to rest and sleep one night at her house before taking the baby from Mrs. Smith's maternal care. Millicent had wished Polly to defer the journey to town for two or three days, till—till she was a little better, she said, not knowing exactly how to frame her meaning. For it seemed to Millicent, who had gone through the whole process of a heart-break herself, that to go straight on with the ordinary duties of life after such a blow as Polly had received was not to be thought of. Polly had a right to feel prostrated, and to require petting, and soothing, and all manner of tender assiduities, for a little while, at least. But Polly would not be petted. When Millicent talked of the journey to town being too much for her, and that if she performed it all it had better not be just yet, something of her meaning flashed upon Polly—more

through the tender, tremulous tones and the pitiful eyes, however, than the spoken words. And the two girls being alone, Polly caught her friend's hands, and, holding them firmly, said, "Whatever has to be done I must do, Millicent, dear, and shall be the better for doing it. I have to go on living just the same as if I hadn't been so silly as to make such a miserable mistake. And oh, please, please try to forget that I ever did make it, and then, perhaps, in time I may forget it too."

It was clear that heart-break was a luxury Polly did not intend to indulge in.

Presently a cabman's knock sounded at the door, and Mrs. Williams dropped her work in a flutter, and in another minute Polly was lighting up the dingy, somber room, and kissing Mrs. Williams. She had brought a huge bunch of flowers; dahlias, geraniums, verbenas; and these, and Polly's brown bright face,—for the summer sun had left traces of his kisses on her,—glorified the room, and gave something of an electric glow even to Mrs. Williams's torpid sensibilities. Mary, who had come with Polly, was dispatched into the kitchen, but there was a whole hamper of pears, and apples, and pots of jam, and punnets of peaches and apricots, to be unpacked. Millicent had gathered the more aristocratic fruit with her own hands, and arranged them in their shallow baskets, lined with vine-leaves. It was as pretty work as gathering flowers. But she had hesitated about sending the pears and apples,—"they are such common things," she said.

"And very few of these common things do the little Williamses see in their nursery," said Polly, "and few and far between are their apple-puddings. Miss Pembury of The Hall has very little notion of what a hard fight her cousin has, who is genteel and poor."

"And the apples and pears that we have wasted instead of sending them to poor cousin Sarah!" cried Millicent. "But you think of everything, Polly,—of everything but yourself," she added, tenderly.

And just now Polly felt that the less she did think of herself the better it would be for her.

When the flowers had been arranged, and the contents of the hamper disposed of, and the little Williamses kissed, and hugged, and kissed again, and given a taste of the good things that Polly had brought, and Polly's own traveling dress changed for a fresh pretty muslin, that in itself lit up the meager dining-room as much as did the flowers she had placed there, she sat down to sew and talk with Mrs. Williams. "It was so like old times," the poor hard-worked lady said, with a faint sigh, "to see her," as Polly possessed herself of the little frock which the other was manipulating not too skillfully.

"I do miss you so dreadfully, Polly," said Mrs. Williams. "Of course I know that it is an excellent thing for you, being with Miss Pembury, but still I *do* miss you, and Miss Greene is so idle, and so vulgar, and the children's grammar is dreadful."

Thirty years ago Miss Greene, a very small tradesman's daughter, would have thought herself fortunate in obtaining a nursemaid's place in such a genteel house as Mrs. Williams's. But the Miss Greenes of to-day have advanced with the times, and disdaining

service, however well paid, prefer to take a position in the lower rank of governesses, with small profit to themselves, and less to their pupils.

"And I haven't been to say suited with servants since Susan Smith left me. She was pert, and slighted her work, as they all do, but still she was willing and good-natured, and a treasure when Tommy had the measles, just after you left. But she wanted to better herself; they're all mad nowadays to go to the West-End. And then Madge couldn't get on with the next cook, and that just as I was beginning to think I might make something of her. But the other found out she had come from the workhouse, and twitted her with it, and, before her month was up, Madge left, and took a place in a lodging-house, not of much account, I am afraid; but she said there was nobody there to look down on her—and she's best by herself. But I'll never try a workhouse girl again," said Mrs. Williams, with a sigh at this failure of one of her many trials; "you can't get on with them."

"Miss Pembury thinks of trying Madge at The Hall. I've written to Susan, to see if she can bring to her mother's to-morrow," said Polly.

"It's no use; you'll do nothing with her. Workhouse girls never do turn out well," said Mrs. Williams, with that Christian air of resignation to the inevitable, which we are apt to show when other people are in question.

Polly sewed on diligently for a time. Mrs. Williams looked at her admiringly.

"It is such a shame to sit you down to sew, but you always were so handy and so helpful. I was saying as much only the other day to—now, of all people, who do you think, Polly?"

"Give it up without trying," said Polly, holding up a natty little sleeve she had just concocted, admiringly.

"It was Mr. Tomlyn," said Mrs. Williams, almost solemnly. "He comes here now and then; and oh, Polly! I do think that if you liked, you might have him yet."

"But I don't want him," said Polly.

Mrs. Williams shook her hand.

"It's very easy to say that. It's no use being too hard to please, Polly. You'll only take the crooked stick, after all. You can't expect to meet with just everything in your husband. It's really nonsense to expect it. And while you're waiting and waiting, and finding fault with this and expecting that, the time goes by, and you're left in the lurch, after all. You know the saying of bachelor's wives, Polly. I expect it's maids' husbands with you. Now, don't give up the chance of a good settlement in life—such a chance as may never happen again—because you expect a man to be the very pink of perfection. I know you may go on expecting to the end of your days, if you do," said Mrs. Williams, with a faint sigh.

"I'm sure of that," said Polly; "but I don't like Mr. Tomlyn."

"Well, he's a little odd, and a little brusque, and, I dare say, whoever marries him will find he wants a little management. But all men do; and where money matters are easy, one isn't required to perform impossibilities. And he's going to Hertfordshire. It seems he is acquainted with a Mr. Sampson—the very Mr. Sampson,

it seems to me, that took your poor little step-mamma to live with him. He is going there on a visit for the shooting. Now, Polly, that *will* be a chance for you. I'm certain he hasn't forgotten you. You might bring him back in no time. And I should be so glad—oh, my dear, I *should* be so glad—to see you well married; and don't be too nice or too particular. You can't expect to have a husband made, as it were, in heaven, for you."

Polly laughed.

"Well, I don't expect it, and you're very, very good, dear Mrs. Williams, to take so much interest in me; but there's one thing I've made up my mind to—"

Mrs. Williams looked up with a little interest.

"If I can't get the right husband, I won't take the wrong one. I can walk alone, if it pleases God that I should so walk, to the end of my days, without even a stick to lean upon, but neither first nor last will a crooked stick ever content me. And I do think that to me Mr. Tomlyn, with all his money, would be a very crooked stick indeed."

CHAPTER XXX.

MADGE AT HER WORST.

BABY had thriven wonderfully under Mrs. Smith's fostering care, and she took no little credit to herself for the improvement it had made. She was very sorry, and she said it with the tears in her eyes, to part with the little one; but her brother could not manage his business without some help, said Mrs. Smith, with a little pride at having a brother well enough off to require help in his business, and a housekeeper to look after his comforts. And it would be a good thing for Jane: she could make herself useful to her uncle, and he was well-to-do. Susan was going to be married in a few months. She was just staying in this last place to get a few pounds for furniture, and Mrs. Smith was expecting her every minute, and Madge with her.

And she had hardly said the words when the two came.

Susan was finer than ever. It was clear that fashion descended even to the kitchens at the West, to judge by her appearance. Her costume was elaborate, and she had a mountain of horsehair, very sparely covered with her own locks, on her head. The heels of her boots were so high that she was almost afraid of walking in them; but she would have risked a dozen falls sooner than have been unfashionably shod. Her fingers could not, by any amount of squeezing, be got into her gloves, so that the ends of these latter hung limp and flat, and were in her way even while she held her parasol; but they had three buttons, and the color was correct, though the quality of the kid was wretched. But Susan was honestly overjoyed to see Miss Brooke, and looking so well, too; but wasn't the country dreadful dull? and was Miss Pembury any better? and how did Miss Brooke think baby was doing? She had been every Sunday that she could get so far, to see her, since Miss Brooke went away, but Homerton was so out of the way of everything, and such a dreadful distance from Kensington; and here was Madge. Her 'missis' had grumbled at letting her have half a day out, though

she'd never had a holiday since she'd been in the place. But Susan had told her to stand out for it and not be put upon. "Places was plenty enough, and Madge had got a four months' character now, which was something to fall back upon."

And Madge sat silent all the while, staring at the baby, with a dull, half-stupid stare, which Polly did not understand. The girl was altered for the worse; her dress was dirty and untidy. Susan had made a faint effort to "smarten her up a bit," by putting a Lowther Arcade brooch in the front of her shawl; but, as Madge and she lived at some distance from each other, and Madge's mistress would not allow Susan to come inside the house when she called for her, she had not been able to do much more. Madge looked dirty, too—grimed in with dirt, as if, from one week's end to another, she had no time to give herself a thorough washing. She had made an attempt to do so before starting, but the result had not been satisfactory; and her hair was rough, and twisted up in a shabby little knot behind. She looked worn, old, hopeless, nerveless, joyless, soulless!—neither girl nor woman—a machine, with just animal functions enough to keep it going after a sort, so that it should perform sordid tasks and coarse work in an imperfect fashion of its own.

Mary looked at the baby, too, and chirped and smiled, and felt herself of some importance as its nurse, to be, for a little time. And besides, baby's future mamma, Mrs. Henderson, was Mary's own aunt, so that she was disposed to regard it as in some way a cousin. Mary was pretty, and rosy, and clean, and smart, in a new dress and bright ribbons. She was very little better than other village maidens—might have been just such another as poor Fanny Gill, who had been a great friend of her own, and for whose fate she felt much sympathy and little condemnation, but for the fact of her having gone into service at The Hall almost as soon as she entered her teens. And she had grown into a girl of thirteen in such a home as Fanny had done—in such a home as Millicent Pembury was doing her utmost that there should be no more of at Radley. Had she remained in that home till now, little chance of growing into a good woman would there have been for Mary. But, even *then*, she would not have been such another as the workhouse girl—there would have been a chance of redemption—a possibility of good; she might yet have loved the husband who had condoned her fault—have been a tender, self-denying mother to the children she had borne him; she would still have had instincts, affection, love, and hopes; and, take her at her lowest—say that she had sunk to the level of an animal, and could be looked upon as little more than one, why even *then* she would have been a better, a higher, and a more hopeful creature than the things drilled, nursed, and schooled as if by machinery, which our workhouses turn out by hundreds, and expect, by some miracle, to grow up into men and women.

Polly went to Madge, and held out her hand; the other looked at her with vacant eyes, then placed her own limp fingers in it. There was no pressure on her part. Madge didn't know how to shake hands, but Polly kept the dirty, coarse fingers, covered with an old cotton glove—a remnant of her days in Wurtemburg Street—in hers.

"You never wrote to me, Madge; and you told me you could write, you know. I quite expected to hear from you. Now, tell me how you are getting on, and how you like your place."

"I don't like it at all," said Madge. "But my likes doesn't matter, that I see. And I didn't write, because I didn't think you'd want to be troubled with hearing of me. What was the good?"

Every word uttered in the same limp, hopeless way that seemed to characterize the whole girl. It was as if she saw the good of nothing—hoped for nothing—expected nothing, and, God help us! believed in nothing! In God? No. Knowledge of him was part of one of the school lessons which she had learned by note, because compelled to do so, when a child, and was forgetting as fast as possible. In love? She had known nothing, seen nothing of it in her childhood. Others believe in love, because they can never remember the time when they did not feel something of its influence. But to this girl, who had been just let to live because the State did not choose to incur the guilt of infanticide; who had slowly struggled through a sunless, stinted childhood, love, unselfish kindliness, was as incomprehensible as sunshine would be to a plant—if plants had consciousness—that had grown in a cellar to which not a ray of light could penetrate.

"But I did want to hear from you, Madge. And you haven't yet told me why you don't like your place. Is the work too hard?" said Polly.

"I don't mind work. One can but keep doing. Missis jaws, but I don't mind that. Only she's very close with the food. I help myself, of course, whenever I can," said Madge, with a gleam of cunning in her eye. "But then there isn't much to take, an' I don't see that I ought to be cut short o' my vittles."

Her voice was raised a little above its usual dead level when she spoke of this grievance, just as a machine might creak harshly if it were claiming the oil that was to keep it in working order.

"I could tell you of a better place, Madge, if you would promise me to do your best in it; and you can work, I know," said Polly. "Miss Pembury's kitchen-maid is leaving her, to take a higher situation. The cook likes a strong, willing girl under her, that she can train and teach as she has done this one. Would you like to come?"

"I suppose it's a great house, and lots of servants?" asked Madge

"Nine or ten in the house; and then there are the outdoor servants," said Polly, cheerfully. "Plenty of company for you, Madge."

"A great deal more nor I should want," said the girl, sullenly; a dull, red flush mounting to her forehead. "I won't go nowhere where they'll twit me with being a workhus brat. I've had enough of that at Mrs. Williams's."

"But you wouldn't have it at the Hall," pleaded Polly; "Miss Pembury would take care that her servants should not be so cruel and unfeeling."

"What 'ud she know of what goes on in the kitchen when she's up in the parlor?" said Madge. "No, gals like me are best by theirselves. If my missis gives me more jaw than I like, I sarce

her back, an' she knows she won't get one to do the work so well in a hurry, so she puts up with it. But I don't want to have to do with other servants. If my ways ain't just like their ways, they're always ready with "What can you expect from the workhus?" Now, my missis knows if she was to say that, I should put on my things and go, an' she might go to the workhus or where she could for another; an' when I leaves her—an' I daresay I shall want a change after a bit—I shall look out for a place of the same sort. I'm not afraid of work, but I don't like fine ways, an' I won't be looked down on by other gals."

"Will you write to me when you are out of place," said Polly, "and let me see if Miss Pembury can't do something for you?"

"Don't want her to," answered Madge; "don't want to be beholden to no one. Haven't got no need, neither. When I'm out of place, if I've got nowhere else to go to, the workhus is bound to take me back. I know my rights. I was born there, an' they can't shut me out. But I don't want to go back to it yet. I don't mind work, so long as I don't get sarce; but before I *do* go back," she muttered, sullenly,—and this time something of an animal at its lowest, and worst, and vilest, came into her face,—no, it was not animalism, for there are infinitely lower depths in degraded human nature than that, it was humanity that had never had a glimpse of God, a glimmering of goodness, and was alive only to its basest and coarsest instincts,—"before I *do* go back, I'll have my fling, like other gals, and see a little of the world first."

Polly was struck dumb for a moment by the utter hopelessness of the case. Was there nothing in this poor creature for her to appeal to? Womanhood was not dead within her—it had never existed. She had no hope of better things; she had never conceived their possibility as regarded herself. To end her days within the workhouse walls, as she had begun them,—to drag on year after year of the workhouse life, with food, raiment, labor, duly portioned out, and no care, no thought, no dread, no aspiration,—was all she looked forward to, after—and what horrible depths of sin and infamy did the girl mean in those few words—after she "had had her fling."

Then presently Polly recovered breath, and made one last effort. "I should have thought you would have liked to have been near baby, Madge, and I am going to take it back to Radley. You could see it so often if you were at the Hall."

Madge looked very earnestly at the baby for a moment.

"I'm glad she's goin' with you. I'm glad you've saved her from the workhus; she'll never grow up into such a gal as me. But it's no good my bein' near her. She wouldn't care for me when she got bigger; nobody never does care for us workhus gals, somehow. We wasn't made to be liked," said Madge, with a hard little laugh, that brought the tears in Polly's eyes.

Then she went up to the baby. Mary had made friends with it long since. The little creature cooed and laughed at her bright cheeks and ribbons. Mary had it on her lap, and was tickling and playing with its little limbs, and talking baby nonsense, while, at intervals, Mrs. Smith and Jane gave her due details of the means they had adopted to bring it into its present state of infantile perfection; its daily airings, and the milk and the bread it required

for its sustenance. Susan sat by, the while, now and then giving an encouraging nod to baby, who seemed to like her finery, or uttering a patronizing remark to Mary, upon whom she looked down with the calm sense of superiority a town-bred servant evinces for a country one. Madge went up to the little autocrat who was the center of the group, and held out her arms to it, saying some uncouth words that she meant for endearing ones. She had never been dandled or petted as a child herself, and endearments and caresses sat awkwardly upon her. Baby cried, and turned to Mary, who was proud of her preference, and hugged it closer to her. Madge turned to Polly with a little sullen anger,—

"I told you so. The likes of us wasn't made to be cared for. Well, I'm glad she isn't going to the workhus, for all that."

And after that Mrs. Tozer came in, and the other lodgers and their children. Baby had to be kissed and taken leave of. The little fatherless, motherless waif had become quite a presence in the house. Then Mary took her in triumph in her own especial charge, Susan and Madge, who were out for the afternoon, remaining behind to tea.

Polly shook hands with Susan. "You will let me know when you are married?" And then she held Madge's hand again in hers, while she said,—"You *will* write to me? you will let me know when you are leaving your place, or if you want a friend? You will let me hear from you; won't you, Madge?"

"Maybe," in her usual heavy, listless tones. "But I don't like writing; and what's the good?"

Whatever little influence Polly had once had over her seemed gone forever. It seemed impossible to make her feel that there was in this world any one who could care for her, or wish to raise her to better things. What little soul Polly and the baby between them had woke to life, was numbed and deadened now, by the drudgery of her daily life, her joyless, sunless existence, and, above all, by the pariah feeling—the ever-present consciousness that she was a thing beneath her fellow-creatures because of the workhouse brand. If she had chafed, resisted, struggled against this brand,—if she had even risen and cursed those who had set it on her, there would have been some hope; but there was none in this dull, sullen acquiescence in her fate, and in the cunning consciousness of the rights that that fate, outcast as it made her, gave. Sick at heart, Polly turned away; and letting Mrs. Smith tearfully give one last kiss to the little one, she and Mary left the house.

Out in the autumn sun, which was shedding light and cheerfulness on the humble, quiet street, it seemed like coming to fresher life, when away from that poor torpid thing, who scarcely seemed to have lived at all. Polly's heart had been very sore when she rose that morning. Her own grief had been put away for a little time, while there was the necessity for speech and action. Now it came back, but not wholly as a grief. She felt thankful that she could love, even if weakly and foolishly; that the living human heart had not been killed within her; that she could feel, if it was only to suffer. Thinking of the death in life of the insensate, torpid thing from whom she had just parted, she could hail

almost as a blessing the anguish that but a little time back had seemed so unendurable, and almost joy in what now seemed to be the privilege of pain!

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE BRIDGE.

MR. and MRS. HORACE GORDON had come back to England after a sojourn of some length on the Continent. They were located at a small farmhouse in one of the western countries. Mr. Baines, the landlord, was able to offer his tenants shooting over some hundred acres of moorland, and over the park of *his* landlord, who was a minor, and non-resident. Consequently, the two rooms Mrs. Baines had to spare were generally occupied in the autumn by gentlemen, who were sometimes, as in the present case, accompanied by their wives.

Mrs. Baines did not like her lodgers. She was a bustling, active, good-tempered woman, with a keen eye to her own interests, and for many things besides, in which the interests of others might be involved. Her present lodgers paid well. They had agreed, without any demur, to her terms, which she had raised this season—Mr. Baines and she justly considering that, as everything else was going up in price, shooting privileges and furnished apartments ought to rise as well. And she might have charged them to any extent for her dairy and farm produce, and still they would have paid uncomplainingly. And yet Mrs. Baines did not "fancy them." The gentleman did not care a pin for his wife, Mrs. Baines told her husband, and the lady seemed to think nothing in this world was worth her caring for. She was careless of her dress, and Mrs. Baines hated a sloven. She looked unhappy, and did not seem the pleasantest of tempers. If her husband did not care for her, she took little pains to make him, and, on the whole, Mrs. Baines came to the conclusion that, one way or another, there was something wrong about her lodgers.

Wrong, indeed! No one but would have thought so to have seen them at breakfast one bright October morning, just a fortnight after Polly's visit to town. They were late at the meal; they went to bed early and got up late, and yet the days were all too long. There were two or three letters on the breakfast-table, but they were all for Horace. His friends still wrote to him. He had "made an awful mess of it," and perhaps some of them were good-natured enough to be better correspondents on that account. But it was very rarely that the post brought anything for Mrs. Horace. Once in a way, her mother wrote—coldly, distantly as if there was a wall of ice between her and the child she had borne; but, she never heard from her sisters, never from her old schoolfellows, never from any of the hundred dear friends she had known in her early married days.

She was looking sallow and haggard—sharp-featured, old, and worn. She had ceased to take any pains about her dress—there was nobody to see her, nobody but the man for whom she had risked and lost everything. She had brought no maid with her, and she had asked her husband to dispense with a man-servant. If

they were going to a strange place, where nobody knew them, why should they take servants, who could never be trusted to hold their tongues? And as the task of adornment depended thus entirely upon herself, she was apt to forget that, in her present circumstances, it was one of the last duties it would have been wise to neglect.

Horace Gordon turned his letters listlessly over; then he saw one with a familair post-mark, and opened it eagerly. "He's coming. Tynsdell's coming, Adela! What a good fellow to waste a few days upon us here! Why, he'll be here soon after his letter. He must have rested last night at Exeter; then he talks of taking an early train to Exton, and walking on over the moor with his knapsack. Twelve miles. Well, he's a good walker; and I may as well go and meet him as hang about in this hole."

He had been listless enough before he opened his letter, looking utterly bored and wearied of his life; but he brightened up now, finished his breakfast with a much better appetite than he had shown when he first sat down to it, and then prepared to start.

Just as he was going, he said to Adela,—"You'll make it all right with Mrs. Baines about the dinner; she told me she could give him a room before I wrote, and—and—I suppose if you *do* choose to do without a maid, you might make yourself look a little more like other people." His face which in all its weary listlessness had still preserved an expression of good temper, clouded over as he spoke. Mrs. Horace Gordon was certainly not a wife whom a husband's eyes would delight to rest upon.

"Who is Mr. Tynsdell? A country doctor, I think. Originally at the East-End of London! I don't suppose he knows much of ladies' dresses; still if you wish it—" and she gave an impatient shrug of her shoulders, and took up her book.

Mr. Gordon turned angrily away. "I can tell you, Adela," he said, sharply, as he opened the door, "Tynsdell knows a lady when he sees one, and, 'pon my soul, if it's only for the sake of a change, I should like him to see you looking like one."

He went out, slamming the door. She shrugged her shoulders again. It was a French habit, and she had taken it up with French novels, and her French style of slovenly dressing when there was nobody by but the one who should have been everybody to her. Then she read her yellow-covered book, and, after a time, it seemed to occur to her that the breakfast things might as well be cleared away. She rang the bell, and Mrs. Baines herself answered it. The maid was scouring the dairy, and, besides, Mrs Baines though it high time that orders should be given about the dinner.

Mrs. Horace Gordon half closed her book, keeping her finger within to mark the page. "Mr. Gordon expects the friend to dinner whom he asked you to accommodate with a bed, Mrs. Baines, and so, if you can get a little fish for dinner, it would be as well."

"I don't know that we could get fish without sending to Exton on purpose for it," said Mrs. Baines, "which there's hardly time to do now, ma'am. But we have some fine young fowls of our own, and there's the partridges Mr. Gordon shot three days ago, if you thought them hung enough, and the butcher sent to let me know he'd killed a sheep last night."

"I dare say you will manage," said Mrs. Horace Gordon, and she opened her book again, as if the dinner was a matter not worth her consideration. Mrs. Baines was almost angry with her, and showed it slightly.

"I'll do my best, ma'am; but with a fishmonger twelve miles off and a butcher two, and he only killing once or twice a week, one can't be expected to send a dinner in just as if one had all the shops in London to go to. And about the pastry, ma'am?"

"Oh, I'll leave it to you; you know what is best, Mrs. Baines." And again Mrs. Horace Gordon turned to her book.

Mrs. Baines left the room rather disgusted. "I never did see a woman like that," she muttered. "She's a ruinin' of that man as fast as she can. If he was ever so much in love, he'd be sickened by this sort of thing. There never was a man yet that 'ud get on with a wife that though it too much trouble to order a dinner."

Mrs. Horace continued her reading for a time; then she rose, and walked slowly to the window. It looked out on a pretty, bright garden, full of old-fashioned flowers, gorgeous now with autumn coloring, and beyond the sweet West Country stretched out wide and fair. Mrs. Baines was very proud of the view from her windows, since she had heard an artist from London praise it, and seen him spend hours in sketching some of its beauties; but it seemed wasted upon her lodger. She turned carelessly away. Once she had liked to sketch, herself; in a very imperfect fashion, certainly, and her drawing and perspective had been about as correct as those of other young ladies; but had at least been an innocent amusement, and a pleasant resource on rainy days. But she never thought of sketching now. All pride in herself and her accomplishments was gone; they had only been acquirements for display, cultivated with a special purpose. Well, the purpose had been achieved, and then—why, then she found that all life was not over. She had gained her husband and lost him, and she had to go on living still; but the little bit of drawing and the music seemed so flat and profitless now that there was no one to show the sketch to when finished, or to praise the performance on the piano. She never opened the instrument, which Mrs. Baines so prided herself on possessing; she never took a needle in hand if she could help it. If it had not been for her reading, she would have led the life of a mere vegetable. The blight that had fallen on her seemed to be eating her very soul away. She was rusting to death, and rubbing is, after all, a pleasanter way of dying.

Meanwhile Horace Gordon was walking briskly on toward Exton. He was very glad to meet his half-brother, very glad to have a special object in view, if only as a change from the routine of his usually aimless days. For an hour and a half, with his dogs at his heels, he kept up his pace, and then he came in sight of a little stone bridge, three hundred years old at the least, that, about half way from Exton, spanned a little stream that flowed down from the hills around, and meandered on until it lost itself in the Dart. There was a little village just beyond the bridge, and once a monastery had nestled beneath the hills, for the stream abounded in fish, and the land had always been fertile. The monks had the credit of building the bridge; may be, many a monk had sat on the

stone seat that was placed in the center, against one of the parapets, and thought, as he looked over, of other things than fishes.

There was a figure now upon the stone seat, leaning wearily over, and thinking to as much purpose as ever did monk in his day, of the vanity of all human things; of the folly of men, who were so easily beguiled to their undoing; of the falseness of women, who seemed only to live to work such undoing. A knapsack was at his feet, and, as he turned his head, Horace saw, as he had expected, his half-brother.

After the first hand-shake and words of greeting, he sat down on the old stone seat. There might be many worse places for resting than the old bench on Monk's Bridge, this warm, soft autumn day. No one seemed to have any business, to bring him across, either to or from the little village, and, with the hills around, bronzed and golden in the autumn beauty of the trees that covered them, and the clear stream rippling peacefully below, Gordon Tynsdell ought to have found the place conducive to soothing meditation.

He did not appear to have done so, for his brother remarked,—

"You don't look as if Hertfordshire suited you, old fellow. It was very good of you to come so far to see me, if there's anything amiss, for we haven't much to offer you here."

"I wanted to see you, and I wanted to get away," said the other, with a smile, which was rather a forced one. "I was hipped, bored, dull—anything you like. I suppose a doctor wants a change, now and then as well as his patients; but I don't want to talk of my own affairs; let us hear a little about yours."

He leaned back in an easier atttitude at one corner of the bench, and Horace, following his example, took out a cigar.

"We may as well sit here, and talk over things, as anywhere else," he said, "though no talking in the world will mend them." He took a puff at his cigar before he spoke and then went on moodily, "We've been knocking about half over the Continent since I saw you, and then I got tired of it, and wanted to come home. She —Adela—didn't care which way it was; in my opinion she cares for nothing now, and so I took some rooms in a farmhouse near here. There's good shooting to be had. I saw the thing advertised, and it does about as well as anything else." He took another puff or two; then said abruptly, "How's my mother?"

"Well—better than she has been."

"And—and—you know." He turned his face away as he spoke, and scattered the ashes from his cigar on to the water below.

"I think Miss Pembury is not likely to break her heart now on your account. You may set your mind at rest as far as she is concerned. There was some talk of her and a Mr. Tilburne of the Roydons, but she did not seem altogether disposed to throw herself away upon him. And now for yourself, Horace. Are you never coming to your own again?"

"What should I do if I did? People would look shyly on me, and they'd cut Adela dead. I don't know that she'd mind much. As I said, I don't know what's come to her, but she seems to care for nothing now. She's made an awful mess of it, it's true, but I've stood by her, and done my best for her; and I think, when a wom-

an has ruined a man's whole life for him, she might try and make things tolerably pleasant."

"At any rate, she has gone to her ruin with you. She hasn't lured you on,—led you step by step to your destruction, and then left you there, herself serenely looking down from a purer atmosphere. There are worse women than Adela Gordon in the world."

Horace looked sharply at him.

"There's something wrong; I felt it the first moment I saw you. What is it, or, rather, who is she? Well, I should have thought you were safe, any way. Isn't it enough for such a poor do-nothing as I am to be sent headlong to the dogs without having you to keep him company?"

"I don't mean to go to the dog's," was the answer. "I've been hit hard, and I suppose I show it. I was very glad to come to you and get out of the way—out of her way—for a time. By a lucky chance, a friend of mine, an army surgeon, was home on furlough, and he was very ready to take my place for a time, so I've handed patients and business over to him for a month; and if you're tired of me before that time, I shall go somewhere else, and at the end of the month I hope I shall be able to go back and look her in the face as if—as if I didn't care a pin whether I ever saw it again or not."

"Then she's a Hertfordshire girl? Not Millicent Pembury?"

"No; but you're coming near. She is a little creature Miss Pembury has taken into the house as paid companion, and made a great friend of. But I saw her first, by an odd chance, in London; and the first time I *did* see her I felt that if I could only afford to marry, which just then was an utter impossibility, I'd have tracked that girl out, and moved heaven and earth to win her for my wife. I could have staked my life upon her, as true and honest, worth all a man had got to give; and—oh! don't look like that—there's no earthly reason Miss Brooke should resign her situation in Miss Pembury's household. A girl who can measure, and calculate, and lead one man on while she is engaged to another is the last to go wrong in that way. But there are some saints worse than any sinners; and I think your thoroughbred coquette, who fences and plays with one fellow, while, at the same time, she is the promised wife of another, is a thousand times worse than the poor wretch who can love well enough to rush headlong to her own undoing. There, now you know something of the story. Perhaps I may tell you fuller particulars some day. But we'll let it rest at present, and find something pleasanter to talk about. How's the shooting here?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. TOMLYN AGAIN.

It was quite true that Mr. Tomlyn was coming on a visit to Clayfield. Mrs. Williams, hoping for what she thought the best on Polly's behalf, built great things thereon. She had acquainted Mr. Tomlyn with the fact of Polly's residence in the immediate neighborhood, and he had tried to receive the intelligence with a certain grim composure, as if it did not in the least affect him.

"I don't suppose I shall see much of her," he said. "What is she, companion or something of that sort?—has to fetch and carry, and do a lady's-maid's work without a lady's-maid's wages?"

"You are quite mistaken," said Mrs. Williams, with a little dignity, which she now and then assumed when she remembered, and wished other people to remember, that she too had been a Miss Pembury in her time. "Miss Brooke"—as she wished to impress Mr. Tomlyn, she would not call her Polly, so she said—"Miss Brooke—is treated as an equal and a friend by my cousin, Miss Pembury of the Hall. She sees the best people in the county, and, if she only chose—only Polly is so odd," she said, relapsing into confidence, "would have every chance of settling advantageously. It is a situation any lady might hold. I was something of the kind to Mrs. Danvers—my relation, and Miss Pembury's aunt and chaperon." And again Mrs. Williams resumed her gentle air of meek and faded dignity.

"If I thought that Miss Brooke would listen to reason, and—and—behave as a sensible girl might be expected to do, I'd see if I couldn't find my way round to Pembury Hall," said Mr. Tomlyn, upon whom the hint of Polly's chances of matrimonial preferment had not been thrown away; "or, I suppose she'll be coming to see her step-mother,—that is, if they're on good terms, which step-mothers and step-daughters ain't always, you know."

"Polly never quarrels with anybody, and I don't know how Mrs. Brooke would ever have got on without her. I always thought Polly quite the mainstay of the house in her poor father's time. Mrs. Brooke married so young, and there were always children coming and going—poor little things! they took after their father, who was always delicate. It seemed hard at the time, but it really was a mercy they were taken. And Polly had to see to the business in a way very few girls could have done; for Mr. Brooke, besides being ailing, was odd and peculiar—no, Mrs. Brooke would know better than not to be on good terms with Polly."

"And it's to be hoped she'd have sense enough to see what was the best thing to be done for Polly, eh, Mrs. Williams?"

"Well, Mrs. Brooke is not exactly a sensible woman," said Mrs. Williams. "But she married so young," she added, apologetically, wishing to say the best she could of Polly's step-mamma. "But I think—yes, I *do* think—that if you were to take her into your confidence, Mr. Tomlyn—just give her a little hint—she might bring you together. I don't think there could be any harm in that."

On the contrary, Mrs. Williams hoped there might be a certain amount of good. She did not quite like Amanda, of whom, however, she had not seen very much, and she had an instinctive feeling that, however comfortably Amanda might be located with her Uncle Sampson, she would like another husband, and a house of her own. But, she thought, if she *knows* that Mr. Tomlyn wants Polly, she will not be making up to him on her own account. She never could be so deceitful as that, after all Polly has done for her.

"Well, I shall see how things go," said Mr. Tomlyn, "when I'm down in Hertfordshire, and one has time for love-making down in the country."

Presently he took his leave, and departed to make suitable prepa-

rations for his visit to Clayfield. He had bought a new gun, one of the best he could meet with—at least it was one of the most expensive. He was not much of a sportsman, but he considered, and with some reason, that in these days of battues, that was of very little importance. His shooting costume was perfect, so was his new dress-coat; indeed, from his flask for sherry, with its silver mounts, to his new dressing-case, everything was as unexceptionable about him as money could make it.

But a visit to "a man's own place" in the country was a different thing altogether to spending two nights, with a Sunday sandwiched between them, at the villas of his friends at Clapham or Highgate. Mr. Sampson was a county magnate now, and it was something to be asked to go down to him for the shooting. A great many years ago when Mr. Sampson had not been very long in London, and was not by any means so rich a man as he was now, he had stood as godfather to Mr. Tomlyn, then a red-faced baby of a month old. Mr. Tomlyn, senior, and Mr. Sampson had then both been young rising men. Since then the former had died, and his son had stepped into his place and continued to prosper. Mr. Sampson had always thought it right to show a certain amount of consideration to his godson. He had tipped him when he was a schoolboy, and given him his first watch—a silver one. He had asked him to dinner occasionally, but of late he had not seen so much of him. Mr. Tomlyn had made acquaintances in fashionable circles. He visited in St. John's Wood, and had friends at Notting Hill, and found that Hackney was very far east, and therefore it was that Amanda had not hitherto made his acquaintance. Mr. Sampson, indeed, had almost forgotten that he had a godson, till some small matter of business, in which they had a mutual interest, brought Frederick Tomlyn to his mind, and then, in writing to him upon that subject, he conveyed an invitation to him to come in the autumn for a fortnight's shooting at Clayfield Hall.

Mr. Tomlyn was very proud of the invitation. He could go east now when it was to his "godfather's estate" in the country; and as, while a bachelor, he could not repay Mr. Sampson's invitation in kind, he took down a barrel of oysters with him, which, as they had fortunately risen so much in price, he considered a very fair equivalent for his fortnight's board, "especially as I shall fee the servants all round when I go. It should be gold to the gamekeeper—well, half-a-sovereign's as good gold as a whole one."

Mr. Sampson was very glad to see him, and very glad to think that he had asked him. He liked to feel that he had fulfilled all the obligations of life in a thoroughly conscientious manner, that he "owed no man anything," and, perhaps he would have added, owed God nothing either. He had been a pattern husband to a pattern wife. His servants were as well paid and fed, he sometimes said, as any nobleman's in the kingdom. He considered himself a good uncle, his liberality to Amanda more than making up for his overlooking any claims his other nieces might have upon him. As a citizen, he paid his rates and taxes without a murmur, and as to spiritual matters, did he not go to church every Sunday, repeat all the responses, stand up during all the creeds, and drop a sovereign into the plate whenever there was a charity sermon? What more

could be required of him? So now, in extending his hospitality to his godson, he considered he was only acting in accordance with the manner in which he had "promised and vowed three things in his name." What those three things were, Mr. Sampson could not have told if his life had depended on it; but a godfather's duty, he considered, was to behave handsomely to his god-children, and show them any little kindness he could, as time and opportunity permitted.

Is it poverty alone that creates heathens? Has not smooth, well-clad respectability, that pays its way, eats a good dinner every day, and an especially good one on Sundays and at Christmas, its own pagans, who have never found their souls, or have buried them beneath the weight of good living, good clothes, good everything but just that goodness which counts all lost so long as Christ is found?

Uncle Sampson was very glad to have some one coming to whom he could speak of City matters in general. He suffered a little, for want of some congenial soul, in Hertfordshire. He did his best to believe in himself as a country gentleman, and he was honestly proud of his forcing-houses and his pinery, which, as his gardener was allowed to spend a small fortune in fuel and have as many underlings as he pleased, were really very creditable, his grapes and pine-apples not costing him more than about three times as much as he could have bought them for in Covent Garden; but the garden alone was not enough, and he had not much taste for any other country pursuit. He had not handled a gun since he was a boy, but meant to go out with his godson this autumn. He told the gamekeeper to look after the game; but when the gamekeeper caught a poacher, he shrank from prosecuting him.

"It breeds ill blood, and very likely the poor wretch had got a wife to see to," he told Amanda. And after that, of course, his coverts were held in very slight respect; so that even if Mr. Sampson had known how to do anything with a gun but pay for it, there would still have been very little for the gun to do.

He liked strolling up and down the village street, feeling himself the magnet of admiring eyes—there *is* a pleasantness in being a Triton, if only amongst minnows. He had tried to establish an intimacy with the Rector, but the latter had very little time to spare for social intercourse, having but a small income, which he supplemented by taking pupils; and as to City matters, the rise and fall of shares, the rates of exchange, etc., the Rev. Thomas Glynne shrank from discussing them, as though such things were far worse than unprofitable, as, indeed, he had found them, having speculated, as is the wont of country clergy with small stipends and large hopes, in some promising company, which was to pay, at the least, twenty per cent., and which having, as a matter of course, proved a failure, had led him to look upon everything connected with the City as something so very much akin to pitch, that it was impossible to touch it without being defiled. Of course, he was always on good terms with his squire; how else would the schools be supported? and not a squire in Hertfordshire gave more liberally to every charity than did this one, who had coined his money in the City, where the Rector had lost his. But it seemed evil money sometimes. Try his best to like Mr. Sampson, and Mr. Glynne—like a great many of his

cloth, as illogical and unreasoning as a woman—felt as if money made in the City was made out of the spoil of himself and victims like him, and found it difficult to reconcile Mr. Sampson's smooth, round, contented face, and unruffled placidity, with the dark and narrow ways in which he must have won his wealth.

Mr. Sampson had told Amanda he had a City friend coming to stay for a fortnight, and had desired that there should be an especially good dinner to welcome him.

Amanda smiled compliance. "I will see to everything myself," she said; and Mr. Sampson left her in the belief that half the morning, at least, would be spent by her in the kitchen. That had been Mrs Sampson's habit when any guests were coming whom her lord delighted to honor, and a very good habit Mr. Sampson esteemed it. But Amanda had no intention of spoiling her complexion by a kitchen fire; besides, she was ignorant of the very first principles of cookery, and had not the slightest desire to master them. She left the breakfast-room, however, and went into her own apartment, where she spent an hour or two very pleasantly, looking over her dresses and selecting one to wear that evening. She did not attach much importance to Mr. Tomlyn's visit. Her uncle had spoken of him as a City friend, and the City friends with whom she had made acquaintance at his house had been all middle-aged or elderly, all married, and generally with large families and good appetites. But even for these Amanda had always thought it worth her while to dress. She loved finery so very dearly, that she was glad of the slightest excuse for putting a little on. And when she had looked out her dresses, she thought she would take a stroll in the garden, and there she met her uncle, who she thought had gone down the village. She had no intention that he should think she was neglecting her domestic duties, but she smiled her sweetest, and said, "Just ran out, uncle dear, to tell Thorpe to be sure and let us have some of his best grapes for dessert, and to pick some leaves to ornament it with myself."

And she tripped past him, looking her prettiest, with her hands in the pocket of a fanciful little apron just fit for a stage chambermaid, and Uncle Sampson looked affectionately after her, thinking what a fortunate man he was to have secured in his old age the services of such a devoted little housewife as his pretty niece, Mrs. Amanda Brooke.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. TOMLYN AT CLAYFIELD HALL.

Mr. Sampson went to the Bridgewood Station, five miles distant, to meet his godson that afternoon. He had the carriage and pair out to do him honor. Indeed, since he had turned country gentleman, he had quite discarded the phaeton and the steady old cob which had taken him to and from the City for years. He was not an ostentatious man, but he felt that he had now arrived at a point where a little occasional display was not only suitable but becoming and necessary, and he liked the signs and evidences of the money he had made about him, and he liked, too, to feel that for that money

he was having money's worth. A thing, be it said, *en passant*, that those never get who have nothing but money to buy it with.

Mr. Tomlyn came out of the station, with a railway porter obsequiously bearing his luggage. He feed the man, not largely, by any means, but still he feed him—a thing he was not at all in the habit of doing; but now that he had come down to shoot over his god-father's preserves, he was prepared to travel *en seigneur*, and pay accordingly. He was very full of grievance, which he vented as soon as he had shaken hands and taken his seat in the carriage. "Pack of cads came in first class, because there wasn't room in the second—cattle-show, or something of the kind, at St. Bede's, and they're going to it. It's not a kind of thing that ought to be allowed—when one travels first-class, one ought to have first-class company—they should have been made to wait till more second-class carriages had been put on."

Mr. Tomlyn was a little mollified by his drive. The carriage was a very handsome one the horses were good, the men—as Mr. Sampson had come in state, of course he had two on the box—looked thorough, well-paid servants. "It must cost him a little to keep this sort of thing going," Mr. Tomlyn thought; and when he came to the house, he began to appraise what that too would cost. He had no idea how to test anything but by its money value. Cheap pleasures, luxuries that cost nothing, were incomprehensible to him. If violets had been a guinea a bunch, he would have made a point of garnishing his button-hole with them occasionally, if only to show that he could afford to do it. As it was, he contented himself with camelias, and contemned violets as much as he did primroses and blue-bells and every other flower, whose sole attraction is that it is sweet, lovely—and low-priced.

That was how it was with his matrimonial ideas. He did not want a cheap wife. On the contrary, he wanted one upon whom he could spend a great deal of money, and who would help him to spend much more. But he wanted a wife to be *worth* her money; to do her duty as housekeeper, manager, and worshiper; to spend his money as he liked; to rule her house, and be guided by him in all things, and to worship him as her lord and chief It was only on the last points that he had any doubts about Miss Brooke. She would be a good housekeeper, clever, shrewd, and economical; and she was pretty, and—with all her quickness of speech and odd ways of thinking—even he could see, a lady. If he won her, he should have something to show for his money. Wouldn't she pay for the dressing? But if she accepted him as her lord, would she honor and obey him as such? On that point Mr. Tomlyn felt very doubtful indeed.

Amanda was sitting in the drawing-room ready to receive them. It was a very gorgeous room indeed, and furnished in the worst possible taste. Amanda had had her own way in it, however, and she was contented. Uncle Sampson thought it looked very fine indeed, and Mr. Tomlyn, as he glanced round, saw that it had cost a great deal of money. The room itself was, like the rest of the house, of the time of the First George. The narrow, small-paned windows were smothered in gorgeous satin draperies, and further darkened by gilded cornices. There was gilding everywhere, and

buhl and showy china, which were all out of keeping with the carved mantel-piece and door. Still, it looked very fine and pretty in Mr. Tomlyn's eyes, and Amanda, as she rose to receive him, was the finest and prettiest thing in it. Amanda, on her part, was rather taken by surprise. Mr. Tomlyn was certainly not elderly—in his way, he was good-looking, and he had not the appearance of a married man. Mr. Tomlyn was attentive—Amanda's appearance pleased him, and he wished to make a favorable impression on Miss Brooke's step-mamma. "And a very good thing she has done for herself," he thought, as he saw her at the head of the dinner-table. "I dare say old Sampson will leave her half his money—perhaps the whole of it. A very nice connection, indeed, for Miss Brooke, if only she had the sense to see the advantage of it."

To do Mr. Tomlyn justice, the idea of Amanda's being her uncle's heiress did not influence him in the least in his admiration of her. He could afford to buy a wife, and he was quite willing to buy her, and, on the whole, he would rather have her without money than with it. "A woman with a fortune is often a dear bargain," he said, "and thinks she has a right to spend three times as much money as she brings, besides giving herself no end of airs."

Then he did not like widows—he had always said he never would marry a widow. So that it did not occur to him that he might do well to marry Mrs. Brooke, though he thought her a very pretty and agreeable little woman "and not too clever," he said. "That's the worst of Miss Brooke. She'd be ten times a nicer girl if she wasn't so over-wise."

He could not help thinking a great deal of Miss Brooke, though she was so unfortunately clever. And he had thought a very great deal of her since she had left London. He could not forget her. It was not that she was so pretty. He had seen handsomer girls, and her cleverness was her one great fault in his eyes; but she had refused him. He had thought that he had only to ask and to have, and here was a girl whom he had asked again and again, and who yet had said him no. He valued her the more, because she seemed to value herself so highly; and now that he was here, in Hertfordshire, he would not go back to London, if he could help it, unless as an engaged man. "She has seen a little more of the world since she left Wurtemberg Street, and there's nothing like living with people who've plenty of money, to make any one wish to have plenty of their own."

But he thought Mrs. Brooke very pretty when she came down to breakfast the next morning. He had only seen her, the day before, in the twilight of an autumn afternoon, and then by candle-light. But her roses and lilies stood even the clear rays of the early morning, and her smiles were as fresh and her eyes as bright as they had been the evening before. "She can stand daylight, which is more than a great many good-looking woman can," thought Mr. Tomlyn, "and she seems very good-tempered, and, without being so over-clever, to have a fair share of sense. I've a great mind to have a talk to her about Miss Brooke."

Amanda had a very charmingly deferential and winning way with her, which she showed to other people than her uncle—not

often to women however—some instinct told her it did not answer so well with them. But with men it seldom failed, and each individual man thought, like Uncle Sampson and Mr. Tomlyn, that, without being impertinently clever, Mrs. Amanda Brooke had, at least, sense enough to discern his own especial merits.

But, after breakfast, Mr. Tomlyn found that there were other things for him to do than to talk over his love affairs with Mrs. Brooke. His host asked him if he would like to see the grounds and the houses, and Mr. Tomlyn went, as in duty bound. Amanda excused herself. "Such lots of other things to see to," she said, with her usual little laugh, and rattling a small bunch of keys in her little toy-basket. Uncle Sampson firmly believed that those especial keys belonged to the store-room and the linen-presses. His late wife would have thought the world was coming to an end if she had trusted either to her servants; but Amanda gave the former in charge to the cook, and the latter to the upper house-maid, and this bunch was only used to guard the treasures of her wardrobe and jewel box. "What were servants for, but to see to such things?" Amanda said to herself; but, at the same time, dear uncle's fads had to be considered, and if it was his especial fad to think her the most notable and vigilant of housewives, let him do so. It might be as well for him to think it, and, perhaps, for other people—Mr. Tomlyn, for instance, to think so too.

So, leaving Amanda to her domestic duties, the two gentlemen went out—Mr. Sampson to do his duty as a host in showing all his new acquisitions, and Mr. Tomlyn his as a guest in seeing them, and evincing a certain amount of discriminating admiration. There was the vinery to be seen, and its grapes to be admired. Mr. Sampson cared very little, indeed, for grapes, and for his own eating would have been satisfied with foreign ones bought at the grocer's for eighteen-pence a pound. But it was the proper thing for a man to have a vinery when his thousands could be reckoned by tens, and, above all, if he had "a place of his own in the country." Mr. Tomlyn knew very little of grapes either, excepting that they looked well on a dinner-table, and were pleasant eating; but when he heard what the head-gardener's wages were, and that he had a cottage and coals as well, he considered the vineries were excellently managed, and the show of grapes something wonderful. Then there were the hot-house, and green-house, and conservatory all to be gone through. Mr. Tomlyn knew very little about flowers—less even than he did of grapes, as they could not be eaten. It being the fashion to wear flowers in the button-hole, he wore them accordingly; but if it had been correct, and sufficiently costly, to wear a turnip or a carrot, cut in the semblance of a camellia or a rose, as an ornament in his coat, he would have been quite content to wear one. Mr. Sampson rather liked flowers, and had a lurking tenderness for Aaron's rod, Michaelmas daisy, sweet-williams, and some other old-fashioned flowers, which had grown in the borders of his mother's kitchen-garden; but his gardener professed not to be aware of their existence; and, as Mr. Sampson was content to be guided by his gardener, the whole garden, which had been one of those delicious old-fashioned ones, where flowers whose names the poets have immortalized still lingered and were cherished, had been

improved, and altered, and leveled, and cut out, till it was as tasteless, and as garish, and as red, and as blue, and as yellow, and as geometrical, and as vulgar, as any modern garden ruled over by that autocrat, a fashionable gardener, can be. Even now, in October, it was still gaudy and showy, and as prim as sweeping and rolling could make it, and as bright as if the highest object of its ruling mind had been to make it rival a kaleidoscope, or the set patterns of a carpet warehouse.

Mr. Tomlyn praised everything, for it was clear that everything cost a great deal of money; and he went into the fernery, which, as he had on thick boots, and a morning walking-dress, was not so great a tax upon his politeness as such a visit proved to some people. The fernery was always very moist—something more, indeed; its flooring generally resembling a pavement after a very heavy shower. Ladies, especially if their skirts were long and silken, found visiting this fernery had its drawbacks. But Uncle Sampson showed it to everybody. His gardener took great pride in it, and so, of course, did he. There was an Australian monster, to support whose existence an unlimited quantity of coke was required, and midnight visits from one of the subordinates. Mr. Tomlyn looked upon the Australian with profound respect; so he did upon the lesser beauties. Uncle Sampson would have told him their names, if he could have remembered them; but not being able to do so, he told him their cost instead, which was really more to the purpose. There was one lively adi—no! let us give the lovely thing the name that brings it before the eye with all its sweet and tender associations, as if some lover, with a silken curl nestling close to his heart, and a vision of his lady's hair floating in the breeze before him, had named it—maiden-hair!

It was not very large, but it was a perfect little beauty, and Mr. Tomlyn recognized it. "Hum, ha—shouldn't be here, should it? One of the common sort, isn't it? I've seen one just like it in Covent Garden for half a crown; and I'm sure, in some place in Devonshire, I've seen it growing wild in the hedges. I don't take much notice of such things myself, but this was pointed out to me."

Then, after the stables and the kitchen-garden had been visited, it was lunch time; and when they entered the dining-room, Mr. Tomlyn found that Mrs. Brooke had a visitor, and the visitor was the lady of his affections.

Polly had come to inquire after her little step-sister and brother. They had been ailing at the time of the *fête*, when their mamma had shown such solicitude on their behalf, and they had not yet recovered from the infantile disorder which had attacked them. But Amanda was delighted to say that they were better, only she hoped Polly would not say anything about them. Polly was so incautious, and so odd, and—and she didn't want always to be reminded of the dear lambs and her anxieties about them.

"What does Mr. Tynsdell say to the dear lambs?" asked Polly. "Have you told him of their existence yet?"

"Don't you know he's away, Polly? Gone for change of air and rest. I am sure he must want it, with such a practice as his. All

the leading people in the country are having him. Not that a man with his abilities ought to bury himself here all his life."

"Yes—he's clever," said Polly, languidly. Then she took off her hat. "I feel very tired, Amanda." Of late Polly found that she got tired very easily. "I think I'll stay to luncheon, if you'll ask me."

"Of course, Polly; I'm always delighted to have you," said Amanda.

She would have greatly preferred, however, that Polly should have gone home. Mr. Tomlyn was staying in the house. She was quite ignorant of his former acquaintance with Polly, and just at present Amanda would have liked a fair field. "I believe, by his way of talking, that he has ten times as much money as Mr. Tynsdell," she thought; "and I don't like his running away like this, though I'm not going to say anything about that to Polly." Therefore she was rather startled, and not altogether pleased, to see Mr. Tomlyn recognize Polly with unmistakable pleasure. "Never heard her name him," said Amanda. "Now, what could she mean by keeping so quiet about him? Polly always was odd, but I begin to think she's downright deceitful."

Mr. Tomlyn thought Polly very much improved, though he would have found it difficult to say in what the improvement consisted. For one thing, Polly had known a great trouble since they had parted—the greatest, perhaps, that a good, honest girl, to whom love is a very real and very earnest thing, can know. Nay, she was passing through the furnace even now, and perhaps the flames had refined her somewhat, though there never was much dross in Polly to be burnt away. She was gentler, more subdued, than she had been, and her manner toward Mr. Tomlyn was different. It had never occurred to her to pity him before, but she felt something like pity now. In his way, and as much as he knew how, he had loved her, and had meant to make her, after his fashion, a fairly good husband. She felt that he deserved a little compassion for his disappointment. He had offered her the best he had to give, and she had rejected it—perhaps not too civilly. There was no fear that Mr. Tomlyn would break his heart, but still her own was so very sore that she felt some pity when she thought of his hurt. And, this change in her feelings showing itself in her manner, Mr. Tomlyn thought that she had had time to think matters over, and to wish that she had not been in such a hurry to reject a good home when it was offered her.

Then there was no doubt that Polly's manner, besides its softening toward Mr. Tomlyn, was altered for the better. She had always been one of Nature's gentlewomen; but Nature is susceptible of improvement. Polly had not seen very much of society before she came to Pembury Hall, and perhaps her piquancy, though very charming, had sometimes been a little too pronounced, and her energy and helpfulness might have manifested themselves, at times, too plainly. But she had had Millicent Pembury for her friend, and seen a great deal of Mrs. Gordon, and they both were gentlewomen by birth and training as well as by nature. And Polly had wonderful quickness and aptitude, so that Mrs. Danvers was pleased

to remark that she had toned down very much since she came to the Hall, and was now perfectly presentable in any society.

"Not but that you are spoiling her, Millicent, by letting her mix as much as you do with ours," she would always remark, in conclusion. "Kindness is all very well to one's inferiors. I make a point of practicing it myself. Look at Rutt. I never give her a harsh word from one year's end to another. Mr. Danvers used to say I spoiled my servants, but still I always kept them in their place. Now, you're quite putting that little Miss Brooke out of hers. What will she be fit for when she leaves you?"

"We'll see when she *does* leave me," Millicent would say, in answer.

Polly was better dressed, too; Mr. Tomlyn saw that. He was a fair judge of the value of a woman's dress. "And the things fit somehow, as I never saw a woman's dress fit before; and there's a style about her," he thought, as he ate his cold fowl; "and, altogether, she'd look well at the head of any man's table."

Presently Amanda, who, like Mrs. Danvers, thought it was as well that Polly should know her place, and, perhaps, that Mr. Tomlyn should know it too, said affectionately, "I am so glad you can stay with us, Polly. I was just going to ask you, when you told me you could, dear, and then I thought that Miss Pembury might not like it."

"Oh, she's not such a hard task-mistress as all that," said Polly, with a smile, which lightened her whole face.

"She doesn't let them put upon her," thought Mr. Tomlyn, still watching her critically. "A girl's none the worse for having a little spirit of her own. How else would she keep the servants in order? To say nothing of the children when they come."

"That's right," said Uncle Sampson, heartily. He always treated Polly kindly; a little patronizingly, perhaps, but she was too good-tempered to mind that. He looked upon her as a sensible young woman, who had set about earning her living in a very praiseworthy manner. "I'm glad Miss Pembury can spare you; but you're not eating anything. Come, I don't like to see young folks falling off in their appetites. You've been tiring yourself out, Miss Brooke. What with charity schools, and Sunday schools, and mothers' meetings, and working-men's clubs, and building new cottages, and patching and mending old ones, I think you and Miss Pembury have more on your hands than you're very well able to manage. However, I suppose it's her fancy, and she can afford to have it; and you're quite in the right to help her,—indeed, I suppose that's what you're at the Hall for. Still, perhaps you've been working a little too hard. So do you take half-holiday to-day, Miss Brooke, as you say you can be spared, and Mandie here will take you over the grounds and the houses. We've been seeing them all this morning, haven't we, Tomlyn? And there are some new ferns since you were here. Did I tell you the figure they stood me in, Tomlyn? Just you take Miss Brooke to the fernery, and show them to her, Mandie."

Polly had a horror of the fernery. To loop up her trim skirts, and go down in her neat little boots on its damp, sloppy floor, was more than the sight of any Australian monster would repay. "If

Amanda had a grain of taste, she would have a fernery in her own sitting room," she thought; and, above all things she did not want to visit the fernery to-day, having a shrewd idea that, let her go where she would, Mr. Tomlyn would continue to accompany her. "I think I must be going soon," she said; "I've several things I should like to get done before dinner."

"But you should see these new ferns, Polly," said Amanda. She took care never to go down to the fernery herself. "I do believe she knows all their names," she added, turning with an air of infantile innocence to Mr. Tomlyn. "Horrid long five-syllable words, that I could not remember one of if it was ever so. But I do think that, of the two, Latin is rather easier to Polly than English."

"Father was in the medical line, wasn't he?" said Mr. Tomlyn. "That accounts for it, I daresay." But even the Latin did not frighten him, as Amanda had expected it would do. "She'll forget all that stuff when she's married," he thought, "and has other things to think of. I daresay this Miss Pembury's a bit of a blue, and, of course, she's got to humor her. But I think I'll give that little woman there a hint, as soon as I can, that I've got my eye on her step-daughter. She's not at all amiss—for a widow, and I think old Sampson is in luck to have her to keep his house in order for him. But it's as well to prevent any chance of a mistake, and I may as well let her know at once how the land lies."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"WHEN ALL IS LOST."

Mr. Gordon Tynsdell might have gone to a livelier place than the Devonshire farm-house, to forget his love troubles. The shooting was good, certainly, and Mrs. Baines exerted herself and gave them very good country fare. And he had the society of his half-brother, and the companionship, when within doors, of Mrs. Horace Gordon. But these distractions were not powerful enough to drive Polly's pretty, sparkling face from his mind. In fact, he thought of her more than ever; and the more he thought, the more difficult it seemed to believe that the girl could be such a one as Amanda's story would have made her.

He told the whole affair to Horace one day, when in a communicative humor, and the other had heard him with a considerable amount of sympathy. "It's a great pity you should have made a mess of it like that," he said. "I should have thought it was enough for one of us to have got thrown. And after all, there's no great harm done, supposing the girl really likes you better than the cousin in India."

"She shouldn't have carried on with both of us at the same time," said Tynsdell. "There's every harm done if a man finds the woman he has trusted has deceived him from the first."

"I wouldn't be quite sure that the deception lies with her. What sort is the little widow?"

"A pretty fool, but harmless, I believe," said Tynsdell, who

judged Amanda as correctly as most men do judge women with innocent pleading lips and eyes, and pink and white skins.

"She doesn't want you for herself?" asked Horace.

Tynsdell laughed. "I can't see why she should. Her uncle will provide amply for her, no doubt, and she is much better off with him than she would be as the wife of a country surgeon. Besides, she has every chance of marrying well. Now, I should not have been a bad *parti* for Miss Brooke, while there is no knowing how long she might have to wait before the cousin in India asked her to go out to him. Pleasant to think one has been weighed in the balance like that!"

"Well, it doesn't seem as if she'd found you wanting, at any rate. I've made such an awful mess of it myself," said Horace, with his eyes bent on the ground, "that it doesn't seem as if I had any right to give you advice. But I wouldn't put too much faith in that little widow, if I were you; and, at any rate, I think you owe it to Miss Brooke to hear what she has to say on the subject. You may right yourself yet, old fellow; but for *me*," he added, hopelessly, "there seems no chance of things ever coming right at all. It's a dreary lookout, to go on in a sort of hiding for the rest of one's days; to feel, at seven-and-twenty, that one has just made a mull of one's life, and yet that perhaps there are fifty years before me to be dragged out—somehow."

"And I wouldn't drag them!" said Tynsdell, energetically. "One way or another, I'd live them! You may say that I've set you a pretty example in running away from my patients, and coming here with my love story. But a fellow wants a little rest, a little breathing-time, after such a blow as I've had. I felt that I wanted to see you, and I wanted to be away from that girl for a time. I felt as if I couldn't think things out when I was running against her every day. But I shall go back to my work, take up the thread of my life, and see what I can make of it. I don't suppose I shall ever marry; it will be years first, if I do; and I shall never see the woman again that I shall care for as I did, as I *do*, for that one. But I've got to live my life, for all that, and I've got to make the best I can of it, and that best sha'n't be such a bad one. Can't you make the best of yours? It's up-hill work, I'll admit; still, do something for yourself better than rusting away here, or idling with the demireps of a foreign watering-place. And you ought to do it for the sake of that poor creature. God help her!" he said, his voice softening.

"Well, what can I do? Put it plainly."

"I'd take up some interest in life. If you won't go back to your own place, take another. You can afford to rent a small one somewhere. You were fond of farming as an amateur, so go in for it now, and see what you can do with the people who work for you, as well as with the land they till. Take an object, make an object for yourself, if it's only to grow turnips larger than any one else has ever done; or sheep with a pound more wool on their backs than any other sheep have ever had. Anything practical, anything purpose-like, will be better than this aimless, drifting life, that you're leading now. It will only bring you to drink, and your wife—" He stopped suddenly.

"My wife!" said the other, bitterly. "Well, things can't very well be worse with her than they are."

"Yes, they can. A woman doesn't always stop at the first downward step. They may be a long while taking that first, but they sometimes go at a headlong pace down the other ones. A woman without a home, in the true sense of the word; with a husband who lets her see that his life is a burden to him, and that she has made it so; without occupation or society; why, what is there to prevent such a woman from falling into utter perdition when the first chance comes in her way, or killing herself, because she finds life too intolerable; for God's sake! Horace, act like a man, live like a man, if only for the sake of this poor creature, who has nothing but you in all the world! Give her a home; speak frankly to her; ask her to help you make the best of things, to take some interest in your pursuits. Remember that she is your wife, and more utterly dependent on you than any happy, sinless woman could be."

"It's hard lines on her, I know," said Horace; "but she might make things pleasanter than she does. As to me, I think I could pluck up resolution to follow your advice, or, at least to try to do so, if only—if only I were not at such odds with my mother. If I were once straight with her! if I could feel that she had, at least, forgiven me, I think I might try and make a fresh start. As it is, I feel out of heart, out of hope; fit for nothing but to stand with my hands in my pockets, and drift away to the devil."

"Then go to your mother, and ask her to save you. I don't say but what you may find her hard to deal with at first; still, there's no knowing; you haven't seen her since this took place. Yes, just go to her, and tell her what you've told me."

"I don't believe she'll ever see Adela."

"Perhaps not; but she may as well see you."

The two young men had been sitting in the orchard of the farmhouse while talking. It was a lovely October day; such of the apples as were not yet gathered showed ruddily through the leaves, that were thinning fast; and there was that soft, hazy, tender light over all things which sometimes gives Autumn a beauty and a tenderness which the Spring never knows. The old red farm-house at a little distance, looked well through the trees, and the porch at the back-door was overhung with fuchsias and myrtles, and out of this porch came Mrs. Horace Gordon as if tempted by the beauty of the afternoon to leave the house. When she saw the two young men, she came toward them. There were only two seats,—light cane chairs, which they had brought for themselves out of the house. Her husband kept his; but Gordon Tynsdell sprang to his feet, and, offering her his chair, flung himself on the grass. It was such a simple act of every-day courtesy, and a little while back she would hardly have observed it: but now she took the offered chair almost with a sense of gratitude. Tynsdell was always kind to her—gently, unobtrusively kind, and whatever faint shadow of self-respect still remained to Adela Gordon was fostered by that kindness. Her husband rose presently, as if impatient that she had come. Her presence seldom gave him pleasure, and he did not take much pains to hide the fact.

"I shall go and finish the paper," he said, turning to his brother,

and strolled toward the house. When he was out of sight and out of hearing, his wife turned almost sharply to Tynsdell.

"He went because I came. He is tired of me; and, oh! Mr. Tynsdell, if you did but know how tired I am of myself! Life does seem so utterly intolerable! No, don't attempt to deny it. Whatever love Horace had for me is gone. He has paid too dearly for me, and he can't forget the price. Oh! if I could only rid him of myself. Once it always seemed to me so impossible that any one, let them be driven ever so hard, could, if in their senses, find refuge in suicide. But now—oh! if it were not for what may come afterward, I think I should rid your brother of me."

Gordon Tynsdell believed her. There was such utter hopelessness in her look. And what had life to give her? He had spoken to his brother of some possible retrieval for himself, but for her, the partner of his life, what retrieval could be looked for? He could give no comfort, for none seemed possible. "My life is a curse," she went on to say, "both to myself and to him;" and he felt that her words were the simple truth.

She was not so negligent of her appearance as she had been on the day of his arrival. There had been always, in his manner, the same consideration and respect which he might have evinced if things had been wholly different. That had shamed her into a sense of propriety; and she felt grateful to him. Perhaps he was the first man who, knowing her sin, had borne himself as if that sin had never been. There was neither the austere reserve that straight-laced Pharisees, even of the sterner sex, sometimes thought it right to manifest, nor, what was worse, the freedom of tone, the nameless, indefinable familiarity, with which some had approached her.

"I wish you would tell me what to do," she said. "If I were to leave him, do you think things would be better? I'd go away and live my life alone, if I thought that would make things better for him. I can but be an outcast, in any case. Why should he be an outcast, too? It would be awful—more dreadful than I can tell you—to live alone; but still, I would do it, to make things easier for him, if possible."

She looked so utterly miserable as if it mattered little, indeed, to her, how she spent the remainder of her days; not reckless and defiant, as, but a little time back, she had tried to be, but simply worn-out, crushed, and broken. Gordon Tynsdell's heart was full of pity for her; but how could he give her anything *but* pity? He had spoken of hope, of some way out of the darkness, to his brother; but to this, his fellow-sinner, how was it possible to speak of hope? In that utter darkness into which she had plunged herself she must remain forever.

"I would help him if I could," she said. "I would set him right with his mother and his friends if I only knew the way. I would do anything sooner than go on living as we are living now. As to myself," she said, almost fiercely, "I know there is no way out of this. I thought if I was once his wife, I might live it down. I know better now. There is no living it down for me. His own mother would spurn me. I can't go amongst his people, and he cannot go amongst them while I am living, or, at least, living with him. If you think it will be better for him that I should go away,

that there should even be a legal separation between us, I am willing to agree."

That would be, and Gordon Tynsdell knew it, the one chance for his brother. He could not marry, but he could, at least, go back to his own home, and take his own place again. After a time, even for his mother's sake, he would be received and welcomed everywhere, once he was free from the partner of his sin. But it would be a cruel thing for him to accept this sacrifice, and it would be base and unmanly—an impossibility, Tynsdell felt, but he was not so sure that Horace would look upon it as such.

"I don't think you should make such a sacrifice," he said; "I don't think Horace ought to take it at your hands. Your love for him has cost you enough already, without its leading you to give yet more."

"Love! no, I don't think it's love *now*," she said, wearily; "even that seems dead. Only I am so wretched, so broken, that a little misery more or less doesn't much matter. I suppose I was fond of him, or I never could have acted so madly as I did; but that seems all like a dream now."

Yes, it seemed all like a dream now. She had loved, sinned, suffered; and the love was over, the sin was sinned, but the suffering would remain evermore.

Out of the house came Horace with his paper. He looked at his wife as if he had thought that by this time she would have gone in-doors, and, seeing her still where he had left her, he strolled on through the orchard into the lane that ran at the end. She looked after him for a moment.

"You see," she said, turning to Tynsdell, "he would have stayed here if you had been alone; but, as it is, I am in the way. He doesn't mean to show it, but I know there are times when he cannot bear my presence; and for me, what do you think it must be to see him keep aloof like that?"

If there had been any comfort he could have given her—any word of hope he could have spoken? But she knew, and he knew that she knew, that hope for her was impossible. Her husband's life would be a poor, imperfect thing, but still it would be a life, and he might make something of it yet. He could speak out to him as he had spoken, and tell him not to sink down utterly. But to her, poor sinner, on whom the heaviest punishment was to fall, what could he say? Something he tried to speak—conventionalities that one has recourse to when at an utter loss for something better, but she stopped him.

"You know as well as I do how things are for women. If I forgot that, in my madness, or hoped that they might be otherwise for me, I know better now. I will do what I said. I will set him free as far as I can, if that will make him happier. You can tell him so, if you please, at once."

And then she rose and went into the house, leaving Gordon Tynsdell to feel that the trouble he had brought with him was as nothing to that which he had come there to find.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AMANDA ON THE DOMESTIC VIRTUES.

Mr. Tomlyn found life at Clayfield very pleasant indeed. Mr. Sampson was the most hospitable of hosts; and the goodness of his wine, and the excellence of his dinners, and the amount Mr. Tomlyn felt sure he must have spent on them, were such as to make his guest feel that his host was behaving with all due liberality. The country air, too, and the change from business were all conducive to a pleasant frame of mind; and altogether, Mr. Tomlyn, at the end of a fortnight, felt as if he had never spent fourteen days more happily in his life.

It was not that he had made such progress in his wooing—indeed, he had made none at all; for Polly had not come again to Clayfield, and Amanda's relations with the Hall were so extremly slight, that there had been no likelihood of her carrying him there in her train. And, somehow, he had shrunk from telling Mrs. Brooke what his views were as regarded her step-daughter. It was committing himself again to do so, as he expressed it, and he shrank from such committing—and it might be as well to see how the land lay before he went too far. All of which meant that Mr. Tomlyn thought Mrs. Brooke a very pretty little woman, and was rather sorry that she was a widow.

But at last he did tell his story. Amanda was looking her very sweetest one day, and it might be that he thought he would save himself from temptation, or it might be out of kindness to her, that she should not spread these little lures of hers in vain.

"A man ought always to be fair and above board in such things," Mr. Tomlyn said.

She was reading a novel. Amanda had a taste for the very lightest of light literature, and her novels could not be cited as specimens of the best of their class. She laid her book down when he came in, with a smile.

"Just indulging a little, Mr. Tomlyn. I have been so busy all the morning, and I thought I had a right to a little indulgence now."

Amanda and the maid whom she had appropriated as her own had been having a grand survey of her wardrobe, with a view, on Amanda's part, at least, to the further inthrallment of Mr. Tomlyn; but that gentleman pictured her a household fairy, flitting from store-room to dairy, from kitchen to larder, guiding and directing the whole of the domestic machinery, and letting every servant feel that the eye of the mistress was upon them. He believed in Amanda as an incarnation of all the womanly virtues; but the womanly virtues, according to Mr. Tomlyn, were not of a very exalted standard. As he looked at her, with that pretty, tired-out air, and the little feet that had been so busy bearing her from one scene of her labors to another, and the book which she had half apologized for reading, thrown on one side as she turned to speak to him, he said to himself, as he had said a great many times before,—

"What a pity it is that she's a widow! Such a sensible little soul, and yet not one of your confoundedly clever women, who are above being of the slightest use in the world."

He took up the book, and read the title. "'All for Love!'" he said, in a business-like tone, as if he were reading off the figures of an invoice.

"'All for Love!'" said Amanda sweetly, and cast her eyes down very prettily.

"There's a deal more nonsense talked about love than it's worth," said Mr. Tomlyn; "but we can't get on without it altogether; can we, Mrs. Brooke? Now you wouldn't think it; I daresay nobody would; but I've gone through the thing myself. I know more about it than you'd think for; and it's had something to do with my coming down here."

Had he ever seen *her*, Amanda, before? Caught a glimpse of her when she was not aware, and come down in pursuit? Amanda thought that Mr. Tomlyn might be a better match than the young doctor, clever as he was. There was no doubt but that he was rich —a man, according to her uncle, who would be sure to make his way, and was making it, very fast indeed. Her heart fluttered a little, but Mr. Tomlyn's next words went far to undeceive her.

"I saw your step-daughter, Miss Brooke, in town—saw a good deal of her, in fact, when she was staying at the Williamses, and—and I paid her a considerable amount of attention;" Mr. Tomlyn did not exactly like to say that he had been refused, but still he wished to enlist Amanda's sympathies on his behalf. "I don't think she received it exactly as might have been expected, considering her prospects, and—and—that there's not much need that I should go begging for a wife. But I thought she was young and foolish,—girls don't always know their own minds,—and that, if I came here, she would have had a little time to think things over, and might be disposed to take a more rational view of matters."

Had Polly refused him, and never told her anything about it? This man, who, according to her uncle, was making his thousands faster and faster every year? What a little fool Polly was, to be sure. And a deceitful fool, too. How could she have kept such a thing to herself? Amanda could have cried with vexation. To think of Polly having such a chance and then disdaining it! But she kept her outward composure as unruffled as usual, and only said, with her usual sweetness,—

"Polly is *so* odd, Mr. Tomlyn."

"Yes, I think she *is* odd," said the gentleman, "and clever—very clever; but, perhaps, a little too much so."

"Yes—just a little," said Amanda. "Her poor papa encouraged her in it. He was, oh! one of the best of men," and Amanda wiped her eyes—she could do no less when speaking of "the best of men," —"but he was peculiar, and dear Polly takes after him. She used to read the paper to him by the hour together, and he had the same ideas that Polly has, and which Miss Pembury encourages her in—it is such a pity, in her position, too—about women's rights, and suffrage, and all kinds of dreadful things. But poor Miss Pembury has had a disappointment, and perhaps that accounts for it. Only Polly will get more peculiar than ever with her."

"It's a great pity Miss Pembury lends herself to such nonsense," said Mr. Tomlyn, "and Miss Brooke ought to have more sense than to encourage her in it."

"Oh, one's as bad as the other; there's not a pin to choose. Why, Polly would have turned doctor if she could. She has the nerve of a lion. I never saw such a girl. There was a boy brought into our place because he had been run over, and they were afraid to take him to the hospital till his arm, or his leg, I forget which, was seen to; and his face was one mass of bruises. The way Polly, while we were waiting for other advice—for poor dear Mr. Brooke was unable to do anything just then—sponged his head, and held him in her arms, was something wonderful. I fainted at the sight. So would any woman with common feeling. But, Polly! Why, she held that boy in her arms while the doctor saw to him, and, I believe, even set the bone, and he said he would never wish for a better assistant. And when her poor papa died, Polly was furious that she couldn't carry on the practice." The "shop" would have been the right expression, but Amanda would be genteel or nothing. And she did not choose Mr. Tomlyn to know that her late husband had been a chemist, in a very small way of business, in a very fourth-rate street.

"She said if she had only been properly qualified, she was sure she could have done it," Amanda continued; "and she would have kept me and herself in comfort. As if I would have permitted her to support me by doing anything so unfeminine!"

There was a little mixture of truth in this last speech. Polly did not often waste time or words in blaming the powers that be; but she had said, when she found there was no prospect for Amanda but to live on her relations, and none for herself but a very spare subsistence as nursery-governess,—"If only those who make the laws, Mandie, would remember that fathers and husbands sometimes die and leave very little behind them, it would be a very good thing for those women who have to make a fight of it for themselves. If I could but be a properly qualified chemist, I'd have carried on this business, and kept you and the children in comfort. The business would just clear enough to do that, if we had only ourselves to keep out of it. But to pay sixty pounds a-year to some man, and find him in board and lodging, is more than we shall ever be able to go on doing. And all because I'm a girl instead of a boy! Oh, if ever the day comes when women have a little to say in such matters, perhaps we mayn't be left to starve in the cold, as we are now!"

Amanda had cried when she heard Polly speak like this, just as she had fainted when the boy that had been run over was brought in, bruised, broken, crushed. Amanda was always ready with tears, or fainting-fits, or anything else equally feminine, useless, and interesting.

"I *do* think women should be women," said Amanda. "I can't see what they're making all this stir about. What *is* the good of all this over-education? What do we want with science and politics, and so many other things that Polly talks about, and that I don't even know the names of? I always did say to Polly, and so I did to her poor dear papa, when, sometimes, he would get so cross with

me because I couldn't understand his dreadful dry books as Polly did, that a woman's place is HOME!" Virtuous Amanda uttered the word *home* in capital letters, as a great many women, with about as correct an idea of what makes a home, in the best sense of the word, as had she, are in the habit of doing. "That was the only point of difference between dear Mr. Brooke and me." Amanda wiped her eyes again. "Perhaps I was to blame," she added, looking up with a pretty pathos at Mr. Tomlyn, "but one can't alter one's nature, you know; and I did think, as I used to tell him, that so long as a woman attends to her *home*,"—this time in the tenderest of italics,—"looks after her children, if she has any,"—Heaven knows what would have become of Amanda if it had not been for Polly,—"keeps her servants in order, and has a clean hearth and a bright fire for her husband to come to when his day's work is over,"—Mr. Brooke's fire had gone out many a time because Amanda would not soil her pretty fingers by putting a few coals on it,—"I *do* think," Amanda went on, taking up her book again, "that when a woman has done all this, and seen to whatever needlework there is to do—the buttons and the tapes that must be looked to, you know, Mr. Tomlyn, let these clever people say what they will"—poor Mr. Brooke's buttons! Polly had given up the charge of his wardrobe to the young wife when he brought her home, esteeming its care her rightful privilege; till Mr. Brooke, tired of unmended stockings and tattered shirts, had besought her to take it again into her care. "Well, I *do* think," continued Amanda, crossing her pretty little feet, and leaning back in her easy-chair, as if exhausted with the practice of all the domestic duties she had enumerated, "that when a woman has done all this, there's no harm in her reading a novel, a pretty, simple story, that takes her out of herself, and gives her something else to think of, than all the cares and worries she has had during the day. I don't think there's much harm in a novel now and then; do you, Mr. Tomlyn?"

Mr. Tomlyn thought not, and he looked at Mrs. Brooke, as if he approved of her opinions in other matters than merely novels.

"It's a pity you couldn't have brought Miss Brooke over to your way of thinking," he said. "She's a nice girl—an uncommonly nice girl—or, of course, I shouldn't have paid her the attentions that I did, and have come all the way down here to—to—look after her, in fact. At least, I don't say it was exactly that—of course, I was very pleased to come here, and pay a visit to Mr. Sampson, and yourself, Mrs. Brooke; still, when I heard she was in this neighborhood, I thought I should like to see a little more of her—"

"Yes, yes; I quite understand," said Amanda, in a sympathizing and confiding tone; and then, after a little sigh, which Mr. Tomlyn was welcome to interpret in any manner that best pleased him, she said,—"Now can I help you? You would like to see a little more of Polly? I'll ask her to come here. But she isn't so fond of coming as I could wish. You see we are not at all like-minded. She *is* so clever, and I am not clever in the least; and then, of course, she has to study Miss Pembury. Or—or—would you like me to speak to her on your account?"

These last words were brought out with a little effort, as if it cost

Amanda a great deal to make the offer. Mr. Tomlyn felt sure that it did so, and he pitied her. "I haven't spoken too soon," he thought, with a little self-complacency. "Well, there's nothing like being straight and above board. She has nothing to blame me for now." Then he said aloud,—

"Thank you. I should like to see a little more of Miss Brooke, if you can manage it; but I won't trouble you to say anything on my account. I—I—should like to be sure how the land lies first. It is such a pity, you know, isn't it?" he added, in a sudden burst, "that such a nice girl should be so confoundedly clever! It isn't the cleverness I mind so much, you know; but it does make a woman so dreadfully stiff-necked."

Amanda shook her head. "Yes; Polly always would have her own way; but we can't help the way we're made, can we, Mr. Tomlyn?" and then she gave another little sigh.

"She's a nice little creature, if she is a widow!" thought Mr. Tomlyn, looking admiringly down on her, "with as good share of brains, too, as any woman need to have, and not enough, either, to set herself up above any man she marries. And if a man *didn't* mind a widow, and a great many men don't, he couldn't do much better than make up to Mrs. Brooke. And I won't be in a hurry about Miss Polly. She's a pretty girl, and a nice one; but I expect she holds her head stiffer than ever, and, by all I've heard since I came down here, she and Miss Pembury are not doing each other much good. No, I'll wait a bit, as I said. I'll see how the land lies in that quarter first. A man's a fool to marry unless he's sure of being master in his own house. And women like Miss Brooke are apt sometimes to fancy they've brains enough for master and mistress too."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HORACE AND HIS MOTHER.

AMANDA, who had a different opinion of her own abilities from that entertained by Mr. Tomlyn, was of opinion that, clever as she was, she had not been clever enough. If only Polly had been married, or even engaged, to Mr. Tynsdell, Mr. Tomlyn would not have thought of her, and, being evidently anxious for a wife, would certainly have thought of somebody else, and why not Amanda? "He would have suited me very nicely," she said, pensively. "He wants managing—all men *do* want managing—though, luckily, hardly any of them know it: but I could have done it—and he's got plenty of money—he's very much richer than Mr. Tynsdell ever will be, and, by and by, he will have more. I do wish I had let Polly have her own way about the doctor; however, I dare say I shall be able to secure Mr. Tomlyn, if I think it worth while."

But before Amanda had time to do anything more toward securing Mr. Tomlyn, he was called away to London upon business of urgent importance. "I can't stay here," he told Amanda, very jocosely, "even for the sake of making love to Miss Brooke. Business *must* be looked to, you know, Mrs. Brooke; but a man may

get married any day of his life. And there is not much likelihood of anybody making up to Miss Brooke down here, is there?"

Amanda had, at first, thought of giving Mr. Tomlyn a hint that he had a rival in the field in the shape of Mr. Tynsdell; but she judged, and rightly, that with such a man as Mr. Tomlyn competition for the prize would only make him more anxious to secure it. So she said, —"I don't think you need be afraid of any one running away with Polly, Mr. Tomlyn. Her dependent situation alone is very much against her."

"Of course it is—of course it is," said Mr. Tomlyn. "It isn't every man in my position who would overlook the fact of her being a mere paid companion—a genteel sort of servant, in fact—it pretty well comes to the same thing with governesses, and all that—poor creatures! No; I must go up to town at once. There are things at the counting-house that must be looked to, and there's nobody but me to do it; and I can't spare the time for another holiday till Christmas, when Mr. Sampson has been good enough to ask me for a fortnight. Then I'll come and look after Miss Brooke again, and, if Miss Pembury hasn't quite spoi'ed her, see what can be done."

"Perhaps it's as well for me to wait too," thought Amanda. "Uncle has promised me a month at Brighton, and there's no knowing what I may do here. But Polly will never have Mr. Tomlyn—no, not if there was not another man in the world. Still, he may as well come down at Christmas, and try."

After that, Amanda did not trouble herself very much about Mr. Tynsdell; her own health did not require his attendance, and nothing now ever appeared to ail the servants at the Hall. She had a month at Brighton in November, according to promise, and came back to Clayfield Hall with a wardrobe replete with astounding novelties, which dazzled the eyes of the villagers, and interfered seriously with the devotions of every girl at church on Sunday mornings. But no suitor, either eligible or otherwise, had presented himself during the month, and Amanda was free to devote herself to the inthrallment of Mr. Tomlyn, when Christmas should bring him, with its other good things, to the Hall.

And, meanwhile, Gordon Tynsdell had resumed his work, feeling that he had no further time to waste over his own folly or Polly's treachery. He must put her out of his life, out of his thoughts; and go on as if she were not in the world. Sometimes he asked himself if he had been deceived; but he never credited Amanda with being anything worse than a very silly little woman; and why should she have told him that long story about the cousin in India? and why should Polly take so much pleasure in corresponding with him, if he were no more than a cousin? No; he had been befooled and deceived, and must make the best of it; and the said best was not a very brilliant thing, after all. He did his work as well as ever; but the zest and the pleasure had gone out of it. He studied hard, and he wrote for the *Lancet;* he cured Squire Maule of the gout, which had been brought on by three courses a day and port wine, and Mary Smith of the low fever, which had come on through nursing her baby upon a diet of potatoes and porridge. And from Mary Smith to Squire Maule everybody said that he was the cleverest doctor who had ever been in those parts, and only

hoped that he would not find Hertfordshire too obscure a sphere for his talents, and go back to London, where all provincial minds believe fame and fortune are to be had as easily as Dick Whittington thought gold was to be.

Of Polly he saw very little. Mrs. Danvers was well; nobody else at Pembury Hall had any occasion for his services; and Polly contrived to keep out of his way. Just then her hands were very full, and before Christmas there were no social gatherings going on in the neighborhood; so that, except for a chance encounter by the roadside, when he went out riding or driving, and she walking, the two never met. When they did meet, these two clever young people, who were both as much in love with one another as any couple could very well be, would exchange very polite and even deferential greetings. They would not, for the world, have failed in an atom of courtesy to each other, lest it should be supposed that any rankling displeasure, any sense of injury, caused them to do so. The lady gave a pretty, conventional smile, and bent her head, crowned with its becoming hat and its beautiful hair, with the utmost grace, and the gentleman raised his hat, and lowered his head, as courteously as if he were saluting a duchess; and *she* went on, saying to herself, "If he had ever loved me, could he pass me like that?" and *he* went on, saying, "If that girl had as much heart as a chestnut, she could never look a fellow in the face again whom she has been fooling as she did me."

And all the time, Amanda, who was not clever at all, only so infinitely cunning, and had moved these two poor human puppets just as it pleased her, sat quietly at home, weaving her schemes by which Mr. Tomlyn, when he should come down from London in search of his queen, should find himself, perhaps checked, but certainly mated.

Horace Gordon, and that unhappy woman he had made his wife, were living at the farm-house in Devonshire simply because they hardly knew where else to go to. But of late Adela had asked her husband to take her up to London. She was restless, wretched, dissatisfied,—longing to go anywhere that would give her rest, and not knowing whither to flee. Rest and peace were, to her, to be impossible.

Gordon Tynsdell was sitting down after his day's work, as he had done once before when his half-brother came to him. The work was heavier now, and better paid, but Gordon did not look much the happier man for having it to do. There was the hard, set look in his face, which comes to a man who lives for his work, but finds he has little but his work to live for. It was more than a year since his brother had come to him and asked him how he could set the crooked lines of his life straight, and here he was again, with the hopeless look of a year ago on his face.

"We are going to London for a time," he said, as he flung himself in an arm-chair. "We can't get on at the farm; we're tired of it—tired of everything, pretty well. Adela and I don't exactly hit it together, either. Sometimes she has asked me if it would be better for us to part. Poor thing! I don't know how she could bear her life alone; and she is not well, getting worse day after day, I think, sometimes. When we are in London, I shall take her to

Gull, and if he doesn't do her any good, will you come and see her? She swears by you. I think, after all, you might do her more good than any of the great guns in whom it is the fashion to believe."

"I'll run up for a day, if you want me," was the answer; and then Tynsdell thought how the death of this erring woman might set the tangled skein of his brother's life right. Nothing else could do it for him. And for her—why, what had life to give that should make it worth her while to endure it longer?

Some dim feeling of this, some consciousness that his wife's death would be the best and happiest thing that could happen to him, was at work in Horace Gordon's mind, and made him speak of her with a new tenderness. He was fearful lest he should fail in any duty that he owed her, because he knew that he had only duty to give. And if he did not love, at least he pitied her—this poor ruin, who had been such a bright, happy girl, and for him had made such an utter wreck of her life. "I shall do what I can for her," he said; "she is all that I have left now, for, Gordon, I have seen my mother."

"Well?" the other looked up, eagerly.

"I took her by surprise. I don't know whether I did right or wrong, but I thought if I went to the house and let her know I was there, she would refuse to see me. I went across the fields, and into the garden the back way. I knew that was her usual time for being there, and old Scott, who let me in, told me where I should find her. And I didn't think women could be so hard—mothers haven't the credit of it, generally. She turned from me—she would neither look nor speak, but she walked from me quickly toward the house. That's motherly love, isn't it? I may as well stick to Addy, she's the only thing in all the world that cares for me. Poor wretch! She offered to set me free, as she calls it. It was the only chance for me, she said; as if I could take her at her word! Poor Addy! Gordon, if my mother had ever cared for me, she could not have looked upon me as she did to-day."

"I believe if she had cared for you less, she would have forgiven you long ago," said Tynsdell. "Good Heavens! do you think that you can set one life wrong, and then another, and yet expect to have your offenses all condoned, as if you had been guilty of a mere schoolboy's trick? You've played with fire, and it has burned, not only you, but a great many people besides; and the burned people don't forget their hurts as soon as you would like them to do it. There, perhaps I ought not to speak so plainly, but I cannot hear a word against Mrs. Gordon."

"Thank you for it! Gordon, I believe my sin against her weighs more heavily on me than my sin even against Millicent Pembury. I don't say she deals out too harsh measure. No! she is right in all she does. She has had a hard life of it, and I have made it harder. And I think there are few fellows so fond of their mother as I was of mine; and what a pretty pass I have brought things to, with her! I may well stick to Addy, poor girl!"

"Well, just tell me about Adela—what is amiss with her?" said Tynsdell, anxious to turn the conversation. "I did not see anything wrong with her when I was with you."

"She has a cough, and bad nights, and is feverish and weak, and the weakness increases. I don't know whether it's consumption or not; but I want to do my part by her now—perhaps I haven't been so good, all through, to her as I should have been."

Horace Gordon left within an hour of his first appearance at his brother's house, and he had not been gone five minutes when there came a message from Mrs. Gordon, asking Tynsdell to go to her at once. He found her restlessly pacing the large drawing-room, in the twilight. If there had been sufficient light, he would have seen that her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes unusually bright. As it was, he felt that her hands were burning, as she drew him to her, and said, with a strenuous effort to appear calm,—

"I am ashamed to trouble you after, perhaps, a hard day's work; but I felt as if I must have some one to speak to—some one who could understand. Has Horace been with you? I have seen him. Oh, my son! my son! my son!"

Then the pent-up passion found way, and the woman, who had seemed as marble to her son, was sobbing as wildly as any girl.

"I turned from him when he came—there was nothing else I could do; if I had not, I must have flung myself on his neck, and kissed him as I have not kissed him since he was a child. Gordon, I *dared* not stay! I should have given way at once—I should have taken him to my arms, in spite of the sin that has come—that must come forever, between us."

"Is it not time for forgiveness?"

"Well; after a sort, I *do* forgive him. There's not a night or morning but I pray for him; there's not an hour of the day I do not think of him. But how can I let him be as he was—how can I take him back to his home without taking his fellow-sinner too? And I *can't* do it! I will be just outwardly—I will say that, as they have sinned together, they must suffer together; but in my heart, while I am full of love and pity for him, I loathe the woman who has brought him to this. Perhaps it is because I feel that he might make me overlook even her offense—even her sin, that I shrink from him as I do. Oh! that woman has wronged me a thousand times worse than he ever wronged Millicent Pembury. A girl may have another lover, but how shall I ever have another son?" she said, as once before she had said to Millicent herself.

Gordon Tynsdell waited till the storm had subsided. Only once before had he seen Mrs. Gordon moved like this. Outwardly, she lived as if her son had passed out of her existence. The daily routine of her life, so full of duties and cares, seemed to suffice for her peace, if not for her happiness. And there was all this passionate, tumultuous love raging like a troubled sea beneath the calm surface of her daily life—passion, and anger, and remorseful tenderness, beneath the calm, good sense with which her neighbors credited her as her primary qualification. Perhaps Gordon Tynsdell did not believe her to be quite so sensible as did they, but he loved her all the better for not being so absolutely perfect. She was a woman to resent and to suffer, and love weakly, instead of the unmoved perfection all the country round credited her with being.

"I suppose he has gone back," she said, presently, "back to his wife?"

Gordon Tynsdell wondered whether it would have been of any avail in bringing those two nearer if Horace had remained in the village. No, his mother would never have recalled him. Once out of her sight, she was safe.

"He wanted to get away," he said. "He came here partly to see you, and partly to talk to me about *her*. She is ill—he means to take her to London for the sake of advice."

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Gordon, as carelessly as if the answer were hardly worth her hearing.

"Something, I fancy, that it will take a cleverer doctor than I to cure. I believe she is dying of a broken heart."

"Why could she not die first? It is too late now." Mrs. Gordon spoke out plainly the thought that had occurred to both Horace and his brother. "Her death would make all the difference. That would set him free. Yes, he would be free," she added, after a pause; "but he could never be to me what he was. I had great hopes for my boy, and some pride in him. Now, if he *were* free, and Millicent Pembury were to think of being his wife, I should tell her, as she hoped for happiness, never to become my daughter. God forbid that her married life should be such a one as mine has been! And it would be—it would be. I should not dare to hope for anything better. And yet—and yet—if that woman were to die," she added, in a musing tone, "it would make life a very different thing to Horace."

"She has suffered enough," said Gordon, with a pity in his voice that sounded like a reproach to his hearer, "to make life little worth the having."

"I don't attempt to wear a mask with you," said Mrs Gordon sharply. "It costs me enough to wear it with the little world around. It's hard enough to look and speak as I do, instead of letting every one see that I am crushed and shamed—that all the joy and pleasure has gone out of my life. I must be frank when I am with you. If this woman were to die, though my son could never be again what he was to me, though I should never dare hope to see Millicent Pembury my daughter, still he might live his life to some purpose—he might come back to me, and begin again. His ruin is not irretrievable—hers is; and we cannot alter the world—we cannot make it deal equal justice to sinners. God forgive me!" she cried, with another burst of tears, "if I am wrong, if I am sinful, if I am cruel; but if this woman were to die, I might have my son again! Now, between him and me there seems a greater gulf than death could ever be."

Mrs. Gordon had found, as so many of us do find, and say over and over again, that life separates far more than death, and that those eyes are happy which never shed bitterer tears than those they give to the dead; and, it may be that, when she thought of Adela's sin, and all that it had brought, it did seem as if she was hardly worthy to live; but she might yet be called upon to learn that as life can cause a greater gulf than death, so it may purify more surely and expiate more awfully.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MISS PEMBURY'S PROCEEDINGS.

Mr. Tomlyn came down to Clayfield for his Christmas, according to promise; and he came down fully resolved to go on with his wooing in earnest. "It's no use waiting any longer," he said to himself; "time is going, and I am not getting any younger. Besides, I have always said, that when a man can afford to keep a wife, he ought to have one; and as to Miss Brooke, I should think that, by this time, she must be pretty well tired of getting her living in other people's houses, and be glad of one of her own."

Mr. Sampson had made great preparations for Christmas. He was kindly and hospitable enough, and, as far as beef and other benefactions went, he was ready to fill his part of country gentleman to perfection. The Rector had never had a more liberal parishioner, but even while he took his money, he thought uneasily how it must have been acquired. Wealth made in the counting-houses of that mysterious City could never be made righteously, according to the Rector. But, perhaps, his views might have been modified if his own small venture there had turned out otherwise than a loss.

Amanda was prepared to be very civil to Mr. Tomlyn when he came. Nothing having come of the month's sojourn at Brighton, she was not disposed to let Polly carry him away from her. And as to Gordon Tynsdell, she wondered now that she had ever thought of him. "As if I hadn't had enough to do with gallipots in my time," she said, her mind reverting to Mr. Brooke and the chemist's shop; "Polly is welcome to him, I'm sure."

But she had sad tidings for Mr. Tomlyn, when he came, of the manner in which Polly and Miss Pembury had comported themselves.

"They are the talk of the whole country," she said. "Polly always was so odd, but Miss Pembury has made her ten times worse. They are going in for everything that's dreadful, and unfeminine, and unlady-like. I can't tell you half that's said about them. And as to remonstrating with Polly, where's the use? She never would be guided by me. Ah! Mr. Tomlyn," and Amanda again wiped her eyes, which somehow no amount of weeping ever dulled or disfigured, "a step-mother hasn't an easy life of it, especially when her husband has a daughter almost as old as herself, and as self-willed as Polly. I never could gain any influence over that girl. But how was it to be expected, when I was no more than a child myself when Mr. Brooke first brought me home?"

"And what have Miss Pembury and Miss Brooke been doing, now?" asked Mr. Tomlyn.

"Don't ask me," cried Amanda, with a little gesture of horror. "It's too dreadful to be talked about. But I suppose you ought to know, too," she added; "and perhaps, if you hear of it from other

quarters, things may be made out worse than they are. And there's no need for that, is there?"

But "things" could hardly have been made very much worse than Amanda made them, for she informed Mr. Tomlyn that Miss Pembury was strongly advocating the Women's Rights question in all its bearings; that she had been seen on the platform when a lady had delivered a lecture on the subject; and that it was believed she had some intention of putting up for the representation of the county at the next vacancy. She had also set up a penitentiary or reformatory in the village, for shocking, dreadful creatures—"oh! I am ashamed to speak of them, Mr. Tomlyn," said Amanda, with averted face; and Polly, of course, had aided and abetted Miss Pembury in all these unfeminine proceedings. "Indeed, Polly is the worst of the two," said Amanda, her righteous indignation rising; "for I believe Miss Pembury could be made to do just whatever she pleases; but as to Polly, she always had a will and a way of her own, and she took good care to make her own will and way do for other people, too."

The real truth of all Miss Pembury's proceedings was this. She *had* gone to hear a lecture in St. Bede's by a lady lecturer on the subject in question. She was accompanied by Polly, and, being chaperoned by Mrs. Gordon, even Mrs. Danvers had nothing to say against her going. "I can't imagine that you'll derive any amusement from it," she said, "beyond the oddity of the thing. Still, a great many people are going; and, of course, if Mrs. Gordon is with you, nobody can see anything to object to."

Polly was wild to go; but then Polly was a thorough little revolutionist. Mrs. Gordon had said "it might be as well for Millicent to hear what was to be said on the women's side of the question. Down in Hertfordshire we hear plenty of what is to be said on the other." And Mrs. Gordon had gone and chaperoned the two girls, feeling glad that she had something to do that would take her out of herself for a time. She could not, she would not, give herself up to that great grief of hers. It shadowed her home, it was with her at her up-rising and her down-lying, in her walks and by her hearth, but it should not conquer her. She had lived other sorrows down. She might never hope to do so with this—she could never hope that its anguish and its smart would be forgotten; but if it was to be her companion for life, it should not be her master. She would go out of her own life to live in that of others; she would interest herself in all the movements, struggles, and interests of the busy life around her, and it would be well for Millicent to do so likewise.

The lecturer of that evening had been graceful, elegant, and well-dressed, and she had made a great many converts, especially amongst the gentlemen who heard her, and, being the daughter of an old acquaintance of Mrs. Gordon's, that lady had gone on to the platform when the lecture was over, and introduced Miss Pembury and Polly to her. There had been a few words interchanged, and the little incident was duly noted in the country papers, and excited some gossip in the county circles. Mrs. Gordon could do no wrong—her reputation for good sense was too well established; but Miss Pembury was too young, as yet, to have acquired so enviable a character; besides, she had been crossed in love, and it was only

natural that she should be so odd and peculiar in consequence. As to the Reformatory, that resolved itself into a home for poor, destitute children — "the shameless, dreadful creatures" of whom Amanda had spoken with such horror being all girls under thirteen. Millicent had become acquainted at Mrs. Gordon's house, last summer, with one of those women who are as the very salt of the earth to our great cities—a woman still in the early prime of her life, gently born, well connected, and with a face fair enough to have made the light of a fireside. And this woman, a lady in the best sense of the word, had been fighting the Lord's battle in the narrow lanes and crowded alleys of our great Babel. In slums and courts, where many a man would hesitate to go, she was waging warfare with sin, and evil, and disease. Now, stricken down and tired, she had come for a little rest and breathing-time to Mrs. Gordon, who had known her mother when they were girls, and herself for years as a correspondent; and to Millicent, waking up to some consciousness of what a woman might make of her life, even if its first great venture had failed, Miss Bligh seemed the incarnation of all saintly goodness, and self-sacrifice; while Polly, who was a natural hero-worshiper, could have fallen at her feet in reverence.

"I shall be spoiled between you all," said Miss Bligh, laughing. "You will make me think that the little I do, and oh! it does seem so little, when one sees all that there is to be done, is so very much. Just as if you had no work down here in the country, and were not doing it to good purpose, too!"

"Yes, Miss Pembury has found a few giants to kill," said Polly, who, of late, had taken to worshiping her friend; "and she is conquering them fast."

"My giants!" said Millicent. "The giants would live long enough if the slaying them rested with me. Polly, you would do ten times the work that I shall ever do if you were in my place. When I see what Miss Bligh has done, and what you might do, I feel a very useless creature indeed."

"We wouldn't have you otherwise," cried Polly. "We want lilies and roses in this world as well as sturdy briers like me—not even sweet briers, I'm afraid," she added, with a comic ruefulness. "We want some like you, Millicent, to show how a woman can be sweet and graceful, and a lady all through, and yet spend herself for others without losing one whit of her sweetness and refinement."

"I would give some of my so-called refinement and sweetness to be as useful and as helpful as you are, Polly; and as to Miss Bligh, when I look at my own daily life, with its surroundings of ease and plenty, and compare it to hers, spent in those dreadful London streets, I feel as if my busiest days, my most disagreeable duties, were only hours of idleness and tasks of pleasure."

"You are doing your work in your own appointed place—doing it where God has set you," said Miss Bligh, gravely. "For me, my life has been cast in London, and so my work has come to me naturally."

"Ah, but if I could only help you!" said Millicent. "It is so little I seem able to do, and I have so much given me."

"Help! oh, never fear but that I should be glad of your help!" cried Miss Bligh. "What you could do for me, living down here

in the country, in the midst of this sweet, pure air, which only to breathe is like inhaling another life, is more than I can tell. Only you may find, if I take you at your word, that I shall be taxing you overmuch."

"No, I am not afraid of that," said Millicent, gravely. "God has done so much for me, let me try and do a little for Him."

It seemed as if it could not be the same Millicent who had been ready to lie down and die because her lover had played her false, who spoke thus. And yet the love had been the one great fact of her life. The time would never come when she would be able to look upon Horace Gordon with indifference; and whatever new powers or feelings the years might bring, they would never bring her the power of loving any one as she had loved him. So that her life had had this great and irremediable loss, that its first and best love had been thrown away. But she had learned better than to think that a loveless and conventional marriage could atone for the want of a full and perfect one.

Miss Bligh went back to London, to do *her* work harder than ever. She had not been long away, when she wrote to Millicent, asking her if indeed she was still willing to help, and telling her in what way she could aid. There were three girls—fatherless, motherless—outcasts from their birth, living, who shall say how?—children, *girl*-children of the gutter. One knows of the London *gamin*, saucy, precocious, old in iniquity before his time; but for him, the boy, there is always, at any stage of his career, the chance, the possibility of ultimate redemption. Even the thief, so long as he stops short of murder, may yet win his way to better things, and, given a helping hand, end his days an honest man. But the *girl gamin*,—the motherless, fatherless female child, to whom purity and modesty have been things unknown almost from her very birth, who would rather live on the offal of the streets and the refuse of the markets than be caged in a workhouse—who shall dare picture what her life must be?—who may speak of it, how shall one dare to tell the true condition of those outcast children?

Miss Bligh had come across three such, of those whose past lives, short as they were, one may not dare to speak. First one and then another of these wild, savage, hopeless creatures had come in her way. A woman less pure would have shrunk from their impurity—a woman less good, from the sin in which they seemed so steeped; but she—ah! there are some women before whom we weaker ones could bow down as reverently as we do to Christ!—she was fearless in her own goodness, and she gave those wretched ones a temporary refuge, and looked round her for some other place for them.

Anywhere away from London, where their old companions could not find them. They were not fit, these creatures, to whom no chance of good had been possible, to mix with ordinary children, and the rules of a Reformatory would have chafed them, even if they could have been sent to one. Could Millicent help her? Could some home be found for these girls, where Pauline Brooke and she might exercise some supervision over them?

And now and then, at the right time, the right person comes in the way. It happened so in this case. An old servant, who had been years in employ at the Hall, came back to ask for work and

help. Her husband had died abroad, and left her with very slender means. She had been laundress in the house formerly, in the time of Millicent's mother, and for some years after her death. The present laundry-maid was going to be married, she heard; would Miss Pembury take her back in her place, or, what she would like better, allow her to rent a little cottage, and give her the work out?

This seemed the very chance that was wanted. Ann Clare had always been considered a religious woman, but of an austere, grave character; kindly withal, but more respected than liked by her fellow-servants. Time and trouble seemed to have softened her a little, but Ann had always been ready to do a kind turn by any one she could. Would she take the laundry, with these girls for helpers? The whole thing was laid before her, and Ann said she would. Miss Bligh's young outcasts came down, and a little while after another, a younger one, was added to the number, and Polly was constant in her visits to the cottage where they lived. Just now, in the fever of her heart, the more work she had to do the better. She could not sit still and pine to death, as Millicent had so nearly done. A perfect frenzy of work seemed at times to seize her: and then, again, there was an angry shame, like that which had possessed her when looking on Madge's stolid hopelessness, that she, with all this sea of misery raging round her, should think of such a little thing as her own solitary grief.

So Ann Clare's cottage, with its four rescued children, was the Reformatory of which Amanda had spoken to Mr. Tomlyn; but even that did not altogether daunt him.

"It's a pity," he said, "she should mix herself up with such things. They're much better left to the clergy. It's a part of their work, and they're paid for doing it. Ladies had much better let these things alone. It's the same with the other thing. Women will keep meddling with things that they know nothing at all about. Politics, indeed! Oh! if women only knew when they were well off, they'd be glad enough to let them alone. Still, you know, I don't altogether blame Miss Brooke. She's not her own mistress, you must remember that. Miss Pembury ought to know better. But, there! when she gets married she will have something else to think of than all this nonsense, and so will Miss Brooke. Take my word for it, Mrs. Brooke, by the time the first baby comes, neither of them will care a pin if the whole House of Parliament could be composed of ladies."

Then, seeing Mr. Sampson in the garden, looking as if in want of some one to talk to, Mr. Tomlyn went out to him; and Amanda cried (in earnest, this time), and said, "I do believe he means to have Polly, after all; and I shouldn't wonder but that, just out of spite that she can't get the doctor, she'll have him."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AMANDA IS VICTORIOUS.

Mr. Tomlyn having resolved to proceed with his wooing, determined to set about it in earnest. He was not a whit disheartened even by Amanda's account of Polly's eccentricities. "She'll get

out of that sort of thing," he said again, to himself, "once she's married; and I'm not sure but that that little woman wants me for herself, so, of course, she'd make the worst of things."

Mr. Tomlyn did not dislike Amanda for wanting him for herself. On the contrary, he was rather flattered; but still he piqued himself on his own discernment, in seeing that she did so. Then he began to think how he had best proceed with regard to Polly.

"It's no use asking Mrs. Brooke to get her up to the Hall. She won't do it. I can see that. And it is hard upon her, poor, poor thing!" he added, with a touch of compassion for Amanda. "And I don't like writing, for many reasons. No; I think the best and most straightforward thing, as I really am in earnest, and want this matter settled as soon as may be, will be to go up to Pembury Hall and see Miss Brooke herself. Then I shall have an answer one way or another."

So, on the last day of the old year, Mr. Tomlyn went. He had made a very elaborate morning toilet, and really looked a well-to-do, good-tempered, presentable man. He was satisfied with his own appearance, and, with the memory of Amanda's prepossession in his favor, felt that he ought not to despair of winning his suit. "Mrs. Brooke is much prettier than her step daughter, and not very much older, and there's no doubt but Sampson will take good care of her, but I could have her for the asking; so I should think that by this time, if Miss Brooke has a grain of sense, she is hardly likely to say me no."

Miss Brooke was at home, he found, when he came to Pembury Hall, and he was shown across the great hall, with its faded old portraits and its suits of armor, into the drawing-room, while the footman went to apprise Miss Brooke of his visit. He looked around him. Everything was old and faded. There had not been a dozen articles of furniture added to the Hall within the present century. But the room was bright with flowers, and there was an abundance of old Indian china about, and that old Towestoft, of which they think so much in Eastshire. Mr. Tomlyn didn't care for old china. He liked everything bright, and gay, and new, and carrying its cost unmistakably on its face.

"The whole place wants doing up," he said, looking round him. "Everything is a hundred years old, at the least. What a difference it would make in the place to turn all these dingy old things out, and do it up as Mrs. Brooke has furbished the drawing-room at Clayfield? Pictures, too—every one of them wants varnishing, and there isn't a decent frame in the whole lot. That's the worst of these old families; they stop too long in a place, and let it go to rack and ruin."

Polly came in now, looking very pretty, and wondering a little at Mr. Tomlyn's visit. He had been very polite and attentive when he had been at Clayfield in the autumn, but that was three months ago, and, as he had gone away without renewing his suit, she had no fear of his doing so now. Indeed, if ever she thought of Mr. Tomlyn's possible matrimonial intentions, it was that they must be in favor of Amanda. "He would just suit her," she thought, and, with a sharp pang at her heart, "I do believe she has thrown Mr. Tynsdell over, after all."

But Mr. Tomlyn did not leave her long in doubt as to the object of his visit. He shook hands with her very cordially, and he held her hand an unnecessary time; then he said,—

"Can you guess what I've come about, Miss Brooke?"

"A message from Amanda, I suppose," said Polly. "Perhaps to scold me for not having been to see her, but I have been so busy this Christmas."

"Yes, yes, of course, and your time is not your own. She knows that, and so do I," said Mr. Tomlyn, encouragingly. "She would have been very glad to see you, I am sure, but she can make allowances. No, Miss Brooke, I have not come with any message from your step-mamma, but I have come to speak on a subject which I opened to you more than a year ago. You did not receive it then as I could have wished, but you are more than a year older than you were then, and you seem altered, and disposed to look at things in a more serious light. My feelings have undergone no change. The only change has been in my position, and that has improved. I am a richer man by a good many thousands that I was this time last year; and I can give you a home of your own, and I should think that by this time you must be tired of living in other people's. And, though I say it, you will not easily find a better husband than I shall make. Well, Miss Brooke, which is it to be—yes, or no?"

If the man had only loved her, if there had been something of passion or affection in his tone, even if it had been as foolish as a boy's, Polly might have felt some compunction for him. As it was, although disposed to treat him more seriously than she had done when he first spoke to her, for Polly was much more than a year older since then, she had no pity for the wound she was about to inflict.

"No, Mr. Tomlyn—no—once and for all," she said, looking him in the face unflinchingly.

"You don't mean it, Miss Brooke! You can't mean it. You have had a year to think things over, and I should do my best to make you happy, and I am sure you would do your part by me. There may be little differences of opinion between us, but I am not afraid but that we should get on well together. From the first time I saw you, I felt that you would suit me for a wife."

"And I can't say that I thought you would not suit me as a husband the first time I saw you, for I never thought of you in that light at all till you offered yourself to me, Mr. Tomlyn, but I feel it now as I felt it then. I'm convinced that if I were to marry you, it would be a bad thing for your happiness."

"I'll take my chance of that," interrupted Mr. Tomlyn, with impetuous gallantry.

"But I'm not disposed to take the chance myself. I've my own happiness to think of," said Polly.

"I'm sure you might trust it with me. There's not a thing (in reason) that a woman could wish for that I shouldn't be ready to give. As I tell you, I'm a richer man than when I offered myself to you before, and I was not doing so badly then. You shall have a carriage to start with, and fix your own allowance for dress. I'll study your wishes as far as possible," he said, eagerly.

"You want to buy me, Mr. Tomlyn, and I won't be bought. If

I cared for you, do you think I shouldn't be able to go on foot, and dress on nothing a-year? And I *don't* care for you; and if you could give me millions, it would make no difference."

Mr. Tomlyn was discomfited. He had made sure of victory. Polly had been very gracious to him in the autumn, just because she thought that he would never dream of making love to her again, and he had presumed upon her graciousness, it seemed—misunderstood her altogether.

"I am sorry I've troubled you, Miss Brooke," he said, stiffly.

Polly bent her head in acknowledgment.

"I thought that by this time you might have taken a different view of matters, and have begun to feel that it would be pleasant, at last, to have a house of your own."

Polly said nothing—the less she argued with him the better—and he sat for a little while nervously twisting his hat between his hands. He was crestfallen and ashamed. He had made so sure of victory. To those to whom much wealth is the end and aim of all ambition, it seems as if it must buy everything, and yet it could not buy this poor, penniless girl to come and share of his abundance. He went out of Pembury Hall feeling a much smaller man than when he entered it.

Amanda saw him coming back to Clayfield. He had gone to Pembury on foot, for the day was bright and clear, and he had started directly after lunch, saying that he intended to take a walk, as the day was so fine. Something in his manner, something in his dress, made Amanda suspect the true state of things, and she had gone into her own room and cried with disappointment and vexation. Then she had consoled herself by looking over her dresses; and she had not finished this interesting employment when she saw Mr. Tomlyn returning to the house, walking on the wide carriage sweep that skirted the oval lawn in front, with a very different step to that with which he had gone out.

"She's refused him!" cried Amanda, and felt as if she could have kissed Polly. "Serves him right, for making so sure of her."

But if Mr. Tomlyn deserved to be punished for overdue conceit, it was not for Amanda to reprove him, seeing she had done her best to foster the feeling; and even now the course she had adopted was calculated more than anything else she could do to reinstate him in his own good graces. She looked at the glass, gave one or two touches to her dress and her hair, and then went into the drawing-room, where Mr. Tomlyn found her in her favorite attitude—that one of which I have spoken before as admirably calculated to display her pretty little feet to the best advantage when they were crossed on the footstool, and the firelight fell most becomingly on her fair hair as it rested on the black satin of the easy chair she occupied. She had a book in her hand—one taken up at a venture. Mr. Tomlyn was no reader, and he was not likely to ask her anything about its contents, and it did as well as anything else for her to hold.

She turned to him, as he came into the room, with a pretty little gesture of welcome. Somehow it made him feel as if he was at home, as if there was balm here even for such a hurt as his, and he did feel very sore. "Back again," she said; "come and sit down

and rest, if you're tired; and if you're very tired, don't even dress for dinner. We shall be quite alone, and what's the use of so much ceremony between friends?"

Some instinct—and instinct sometimes comes to cunning women more surely than to those who are really clever—told her that he wanted soothing and petting; and he did feel very grateful for both. He sat down in a chair opposite to her, and looked moodily at the fire. Amanda turned over the leaves of her book, but it was getting too dark to read; still it was as well to have something to hold in her hand. She watched him furtively, and did not speak too soon. But presently she said,—"I'm afraid you're tired," and then, with the prettiest sympathy,—"something has vexed you."

Mr. Tomlyn made no answer. He only looked at the fire more moodily than ever.

"I wish he'd answer," thought Amanda. Then she ventured on a little sigh. "Something has vexed you *very* much," she said, softly.

"Yes, it has," was the answer at last, "and I don't think that it ought to, either."

"May I guess?" asked Amanda, scarcely above her breath. "Is it about—Polly?"

"It's about Miss Brooke," said Mr. Tomlyn, presently. "I—I—suppose I may as well tell you the truth, Mrs. Brooke," he added, with a forced laugh; "for if I don't, she will. I suppose every girl looks upon each offer she gets as another feather in her cap, whether she chooses to wear it or not."

"She—she hasn't refused you, Mr. Tomlyn?" cried Amanda; "it isn't possible?"

"Miss Brooke knows her own affairs best, or else I should have thought that an offer like mine was not to be said no to," said Mr. Tomlyn. "Perhaps she thinks she can do better; there's no knowing."

"I never was more astonished in my life!" cried Amanda; "and, oh! Mr. Tomlyn, how well you bear it!"

"Well, what else is there for one to do?" he answered. "You wouldn't have me cry like a girl, Mrs. Brooke?"

"I feel as if I could cry for you," she said, and applied her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I can't say, you know," said Mr. Tomlyn, gathering some confidence sheerly through the force of Amanda's sympathy, "that I feel so very much. I certainly liked what I saw of Miss Brooke when she was staying at Mrs. Williams's. There's plenty prettier in the world," and he glanced at Amanda; "but I thought she was bright and clever, and managing, and would make a man, who wanted some one to study his comforts and his home, a good wife. I didn't want money. I've enough of my own, and I always have said that no man should marry till he can afford to keep his wife. Well, she didn't see it a year ago, and I can't say I broke my heart. A man in business, Mrs. Brooke, has something else to do than cry like a child because a young lady thinks fit to say him no. When I saw her down here, I thought she was wonderfully improved; but still I was in no hurry to try again, as you know; but this Christmas I thought it really was time that I was settled in life, and so I

spoke to her again—and—and—this time, I suppose, there's really an end of it."

"It's incomprehensible!" cried Amanda.

"Well, it does seem puzzling, looking at the thing all round," said Mr. Tomlyn. "I really don't think I ought to have so much trouble in getting a wife—eh, Mrs. Brooke?"

"Oh, Mr. Tomlyn, no!" and then Amanda's utterance was choked by sobs.

"I know I've made a fool of myself, and that's not a pleasant feeling," said Mr. Tomlyn. "A man doesn't like to be thrown over as if he was not worth the taking."

"*Not worth the taking?*" said Amanda, almost below her breath; and then there was another sob, which somehow Mr. Tomlyn was very well pleased to hear.

"I'm not unreasonable. I don't think I should expect too much of a wife," said Mr. Tomlyn. "I want a woman who doesn't think herself so clever as to be above looking after my house and my servants: who has some idea that a man likes to have something to do with the spending of the money he makes and the house he pays rent for. I'm sure I'm ready to do my part."

"I'm sure of that," said Amanda, with a sigh.

"If I could meet with such a woman."

"Oh, Mr Tomlyn—*if!*"

Mr. Tomlyn stood up by the fire, with his back to it. He felt firmer and stronger now that he was on his legs. He was close by Amanda, looking down on her, and, as the firelight, as much of it as he did not intercept, fell on her, he thought her prettier than ever, because, perhaps, of the touch of pity in her face for him. He had made up his mind what to do. If she *was* a widow, was that any reason why she should remain one all her life? And it was not as if she had a parcel of children—he had heard her speak of some—perhaps she had had one or two, but they all appeared to have died. It was an awkward thing to do to propose to a woman within an hour of being refused by another, but she seemed ready to help him over the awkwardness.

"I know I've been a fool," he said again, "in more ways than one. Mrs. Brooke, can't you guess the particuar way I mean?"

Amanda looked down and said nothing.

"If—if—I hadn't seen Miss Brooke before I came here—and first impressions go a long way—or if I had seen some one else before I had seen her; if, indeed, I had thought that I had the ghost of a chance with some one else—Mrs. Brooke, do you think I have any chance?"

"If— Oh, Mr. Tomlyn! what shall I say?"

One of Amanda's pretty white hands was outstretched ever so little, and Mr. Tomlyn caught it in his own two large ones; and then the next moment, taking care, however, that the fire did not burn his coat tails, he was down on his knees by her side, and brushing his mustache against her soft, pink cheek. When he rose from his knees he was an engaged man.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A STEP-FATHER ELECT.

Mr. Sampson was very well satisfied when Mr. Tomlyn presented himself before him as his niece's suitor. It was only proper that every woman should marry, and if she had the misfortune to lose her husband early, the sooner, consistently, of course, with all propriety, she replaced him the better.

"Amanda will make you a good wife," he said; "she isn't so clever as some, and perhaps her husband will have to find headpiece for both in some things; but there's no harm in that. She'll have sense enough to manage the house and look after the servants, and what more can be wanted of a woman?"

"Nothing that I can see," said Mr. Tomlyn; "if a man is to be master in his own house, that is."

"There's no fear of that with Mandie. She's a good little soul, and uncommon affectionate. I shall miss her terribly, but I'm not going to stand in her way, and I shall do what is right by her; she won't come to you empty-handed, Tomlyn."

"I'd just as soon that the did. When a man can afford to keep a wife, he needn't look out for money. But, however, you'll see that all she has is settled on herself?"

"I'll take care of that; and it will be as well for her to have something of her own coming in, if only on account of the children. I suppose you'll have them to live with you? Amanda's been a good girl. She knew that, never having had a family, I couldn't, at my time of life, put up with youngsters, and so she's left her two little ones with her sisters. Sometimes I have thought it was hard upon her, poor girl; and told her she ought to have them with her, if only for a month. But she wouldn't hear of it. Poor Mandie! she's a considerate little soul!" said Uncle Sampson, who, like some of us, valued people's consideration mostly as it affected himself.

"I don't quite understand," said Mr. Tomlyn, doubtfully. Amanda had spoken of children to him certainly, but he had always imagined that they were in the past tense, and had died before their father. Mr. Sampson spoke of them as still living. A widow with children! The widowhood was an unpleasant fact, which he had found some difficulty in getting over, but the children!

"Amanda has two little ones!" said Mr. Sampson, rather testily. "You don't mean to say that you've insisted on the poor little soul's keeping them at her sisters'? Then upon my word it's more than you ought to expect of her. At my time of life it's all very well. It's late in the day for me to learn how to put up with youngsters; but with you——"

"I dare say I shall make no great difficulty about them," said Mr. Tomlyn, "only I didn't quite understand."

He felt ashamed to let Mr. Sampson know that he was not aware of the existence of these children. The old gentleman would either

laugh at him or insist on matters being broken off altogether. And although Mr. Tomlyn felt himself a little ill-used by Amanda,—had, in fact, a vague, uncomfortable idea that he had been taken in,—he could not reconcile himself to his last alternative. To be twice rejected!—to go back to London still disengaged!—for it would be tantamount to a rejection, if Uncle Sampson were to break matters off between him and his niece, because he showed a want of fatherly warmth toward his niece's children.

"It'll be hard upon Mandie to be separated from her children the whole of her life," said Uncle Sampson. He had never thought of that hardship before, but it occurred to him with great force now. "She's put up with it for my sake, but, of course, when she has a home of her own, things will be different; and they're nice little tots, three and four years old. Why, Tomlyn,"—and the old gentleman chuckled—"you'll be set up with a wife and family all at once."

Mr. Tomlyn smiled. It was impossible, he felt, to break off with Amanda, because he found that she had two children of whose existence he was not aware. Neither was he quite sure that he did wish to break off. Amanda was very pretty; he was not sure that even if he had known of the existence of the children, he should not have proposed to her all the same, and he did not feel that he had any right to accuse her of intentional deception. She had spoken of children several times—of their ailments and deaths, but she had certainly omitted all mention of these living ones; still, it might have been an accident—it *might* have been, but he did not feel quite sure, and it would be best, in any case, to come to an understanding now.

"Your uncle is quite agreeable," he said to Amanda. "Of course, I didn't expect that he would be anything else; only I didn't rightly understand him, I think, about the children."

He hardly knew how to put his meaning more explicitly. Had she, or had she not, deceived him? He looked keenly at her while he spoke. Was this simple, innocent little creature, after all, more clever than he had given her credit for being?

Amanda raised her handkerchief to her eyes. "Little darlings! Oh, Mr. Tomlyn, I never let Uncle Sampson know it. I couldn't, when he's always been so good; but what it has been for me to be separated from my treasures, no one can imagine."

"I dare say it was trying. I suppose so," said Mr. Tomlyn. "But, of course, it's not a thing I can judge of myself. But it's odd, isn't it, you never mentioned them before?"

"It was Uncle Sampson! I wouldn't have him think for a moment that I was fretting after my darlings. What it has cost me to look cheerful and pleased when my heart has been with them, nobody knows! But I couldn't tell him, so that I made up my mind never even to speak of them. I always felt as if I should break down if I did."

Amanda made use of her pocket-handkerchief again, but, this time, with not so good effect as usual.

"You might have spoken of them to me," said Mr. Tomlyn. "It would have made no difference, of course—none in the least; but still you might have spoken of them."

"Ah! how glad I should have been to have done so!" cried Amanda. "Only to have had any one with whom I could have talked of them and their little ways! And if I had ever thought—if I had only known,"—and then, as she could not blush, she turned her head away from him, which answered the purpose,—"that—that—you were about to become their father; but, as it was—oh! Mr. Tomlyn, how could I think—how could I dream—that you would care to listen to my silly talk about my little ones, when it is only in the last hour that I knew you even cared for me?"

This was unanswerable. Why *should* she have talked to him about her children, when their existence appeared to be a matter of no possible importance to him. It was unanswerable, but it was not convincing. There was an uncomfortable suspicion in Mr. Tomlyn's mind that he had been overreached; that those little innocents had been kept in the background with a purpose; and that Uncle Sampson was not entirely aswerable for this.

"It makes no difference," he said again, after rather an awkward pause; "still I wonder you hadn't mentioned them sooner."

But, children or no children, he was an engaged man, and he went up to London the next day, feeling that he "couldn't back out of the thing" now and not quite sure that he was really desirous of doing so; but still with a mortified, uneasy feeling that he had been over-reached in the bargain which he had made.

CHAPTER XL

GORDON THINKS HE HAS NOT BEEN THE WISEST OF MEN.

THERE were long winter evenings in which Gordon Tynsdell sat by his fireside to think over new remedies, or study strange forms of disease, or drove through mirk and gloom to fight his hard battle with Death at a patient's bedside; sometimes to be worsted, and sometimes to conquer. And there were bright spring days in which the doctor took his long rounds, when the early violet made the whole air sweet, and the little children, going to and from school, touched their caps, or made their courtesies, and their mothers looked kindly and gratefully after the grave, thoughtful face, which had sometimes been as a messenger of God unto them. But, winter and spring through, Gordon Tynsdell's work was increasing, and his pride in it, and his love for it were growing day by day: he began more and more to feel that he had made a fatal mistake, which was spoiling his life for him.

How could he have done it? If ever a woman was loyal and true to the heart's core, surely it was this Pauline Brooke, whom he had believed to be a false, heartless jilt, keeping one lover in hand while she was leading on another, and calculating which it would best answer her purpose to marry. That was what he had been ready to think her, just because that arrant simpleton, Mrs. Brooke, had told him so. And why should he have believed her? He did not think Amanda anything worse than a simpleton, with a shallow head, and not much heart in her composition. But she might easily have been mistaken, and, before he had believed her story, he might have sifted it to the bottom. Surely Polly might have a letter every

week from her cousin in India without being engaged to him! All this winter, and all through the days that lengthened into spring, he had seen so much of her. Mrs. Danvers had been ailing again, and nothing would be of benefit but Mr. Tynsdell's constant attendance; and so he was frequently seeing Polly in the faded stateliness of the Hall—looking as true a lady, tradesman's child though she was, as any one of its long line of daughters; sweet, and polished, and graceful, with that delicate, subtle air of softened womanliness, of tender refinement, which sorrow rightly borne sometimes gives a girl in the morning of her life—making her, perhaps, more of the woman than she should be by her years, but more of the angel also. And there was illness in the village that winter. It was long and damp; and a place which has been going on for a hundred years or so, as if there was no such things as sanitary laws in God's world, or as if an Archbishop's prayer would persuade Him to overlook their infraction, cannot be rendered altogether fit for men and women to live in, even by two of the best disposed young ladies in the world, in the course of one short twelvemonth. And wherever he went, if he heard much praise of Miss Pembury's kindness and generosity, he heard still more of Miss Brooke's tenderness and forethought. And he met her in the cottages, practical, busy, helpful, but tender and patient, too, with the ignorance that could not be taught to see aright at once; but always there was the wall of ice between them. In the Hall or in the cottage, though they met again and again, and spoke as friends and intimates, Pauline Brooke was infinitely more removed from him than she had been when she stood by his side beneath the railway arch while the rain came pouring down, and for her sake he had asked the lost workhouse girl about her child.

He could not speak of marriage to her, now. He felt that he had let the time go by, and it might never come again. He had been so near to her once; it seemed as if it only wanted a word on his part—and now that word must be for ever unspoken. Miss Brooke was gracious, and kind, and friendly; but she was Miss Brooke; as far apart from him as if she had been a queen—a woman whom it was impossible to approach with a look or sign of love—who seemed as if she could have petrified him if guilty of such presumption. Oh! miserable. The door had been open once, and was now closed in his face for evermore.

He was a cleverer man by far than his half-brother Horace, but it seemed to him that he had made as great a failure of his life at its very outset. If Pauline Brooke was lost to him, it was more than doubtful whether he should ever find the woman he could put in her place. He was not one to be easily satisfied with a wife. He could not content himself with a woman who, however clever she might be in her household duties, had no thought beyond them. A housekeeper would have sufficed him in that case, without his entering into the bondage of marriage with her. Neither would any amount of watchfulness and submissive affection atone for the entire want of intellectual companionship. It was not a spaniel that he wanted to cringe at his feet and worship him with eyes that saw no flaw, but a woman to walk by his side, and help him, and be helped herself, in their joint way through life. Now, he should

have to walk alone, in all probability, through the remainder of his days, and the prospect was not a pleasant one.

Perhaps Polly bore the estrangement that had come between them better than did he. She, at least, was blameless. After the first bitter smart of wounded pride, she felt that she had nothing to reproach herself with. There was a great pain, and however numbed and deadened, it would be felt, she knew, more or less, all her life; for she had *loved* Gordon Tynsdell. And love, to Polly—to a girl to whom even flirtations were unknown ways of passing the time—meant something very different to what it does to those young ladies who have two or three tender passions every season, and change their loves as they do their fashions. Polly had never had time, she would have said, for anything of that kind; and it was a mercy that, having made what she considered the one great mistake of her life, she had no leisure now to sit down and weep over it.

She saw Gordon Tynsdell's repentance, and saw, too, that he wished to put things back on their old footing. But she had her own explanation for this. "Amanda has thrown him off for the sake of Mr. Tomlyn, and, I suppose, sooner than have no wife at all, he would come back to me. Thanks, Mr. Tynsdell, for the honor, but I should never care to marry the man whom Amanda could content."

Polly was not likely to marry at all, now. She felt as if any second love would be impossible for her.

"I shall stay here as long as I am wanted," she said; "and if Millicent never marries, which seems likely now, I shall be her husband instead of Mr. Tynsdell's wife."

And, in the friendship between the two girls, that seemed almost Polly's position—not an uncommon one for the stronger to assume when two women cast their lot together.

When the spring was far advanced, and the orchard trees were white with apple-blossoms, Gordon Tynsdell had a letter from his brother Horace. He had not heard from him for some time—there was nothing to write about according to Horace. There was no news—what news could he have to tell? And so the weeks and the months drifted on, and his brother had not heard of him. Now he wrote to say that Adela was ill—seriously, dangerously ill, he believed. He had tried one doctor after another, and, all alike, with the same result; she was no better. Would Tynsdell come, if only for a night, and say what he thought of her?

"I could go this very afternoon," thought Tynsdell, when he had read the letter. "I have not been so much at leisure for months. I can spend the evening with them, and study Adela at my leisure, and come down by the first train in the morning. It will only be getting this day's round over a little earlier, and beginning to-morrow's a little later than usual."

The post came in early, so that he was able to start on his rounds an hour sooner than usual. And, the spring having improved all the ailments away that the winter had been troubling people with, he had very soon got through his morning's work—so soon, that he found himself at the Holmes in good time for luncheon, with the whole afternoon stretching out fair and clear before him, and offering an unwonted expanse of leisure.

Whenever he heard from Horace, he had been in the habit of calling on Mrs. Gordon, and letting her know he had had some tidings of him. Between the mother and son there was no correspondence. If half a world had been between them, nay, if the grave itself had intervened, the separation could hardly have been more complete. But still Tynsdell knew that Mrs. Gordon was hungering and thirsting for word of the absentee, and that he was never so welcome as when he took her such word.

"I am going to London by this afternoon's train," he said to her, and she knew by his manner whom he was going to see.

"Has he—has Horace sent for you?" she said. It was always with a spasm of pain that she uttered her son's name.

"Yes—he wants me to see her. His wife is very ill—much worse than when he was here."

She was silent for a time; then she looked up. "The thought will haunt me that, if she were to die, my son might be my own again! No, never as he was; all my pride and joy in him are gone; but still he would be my own once more. I know that it is wicked of me,—I know that he has sinned against Millicent Pembury almost as much as that woman did against her husband,—I know that I am unjust; but still, while the world *does* mete out such different judgment to erring men than it does to fallen women, I can't, do what I will, I *can't* help feeling that my son's life might be begun again if she were removed from it. And we can't alter the world,—there is no fresh beginning possible for her."

Presently she said, "I don't know in what manner they are living. Horace, of course, draws whatever he requires from the estate, and everything that money can give he is quite able to give her, but still he might think that she would do better here. He might even fancy that she would be benefited by being under your care. And there are many comforts, even luxuries, here that he could hardly have in any furnished house in the neighborhood of London. And she is his wife, and this is his rightful home. I am ready to leave it at a day's notice, if he wishes to bring her here. Tell him that."

"He will never come here, if his doing so causes you to go. If you would give him one word of forgiveness!"

"If I forgive him, I must forgive her—if she is living when I give such forgiveness. I can't help giving different measure to these two sinners in my heart, but outwardly, at least, let me be just. And I never can take that woman's hand or look upon her as a daughter."

When he was going, Tynsdell said to her again,—"Won't you give me one word—one message for him but what you have said?"

"Nothing. I am ready to leave this house if he wishes to return to it: but if I were to look upon him again as my son, I must look on her as my daughter, and I cannot do it."

CHAPTER XLI.

TREATS OF NOVEL READING.

GORDON TYNSDELL went up to London that afternoon, and was at Fulham by seven o'clock. He found his brother in an old-fashioned house, which modern improvements had mercifully spared.

It was a pretty little place enough, and surrounded by a garden. The rooms were small and low, but there were plenty of them. But the garden, and the privacy of the situation, had attracted Horace Gordon to it. "Adela used to be able to walk in the garden every day when we first came," said Horace; "she scarcely ever leaves her room now; but you'll see her after dinner."

The dinner was a quiet one. Horace had very little to say. He was depressed and dull, and let Tynsdell start what subject he would, seemed unable to keep up with it. His seemed a lost life altogether. "If he goes on much longer like this, he will die from the head downwards," thought Tynsdell.

Horace had given up his club. He fancied some of the men looked shyly on him. Very likely it was only fancy. He was not a woman, to have such judgment meted out to him as women mete out to one another. *He*, at least, whatever Adela might have done, had not sinned inexpiably. He had never been much of a reader, and had not the mental stamina necessary to take up a course of study. He absolutely had not the least idea what to do with the days that seemed so endless. "There's no use in hiding the fact," he said; "I have made a mull of my life, and can't set it right. There was just the right place for me. I should have wanted nothing better than the position I was born to; and I have gone and lost it, and can't take any other."

When dinner was over, he took Tinsdell to Adela's room. The latter was struck by the peculiarities of the house as he went out. "Two staircases?" he said. "Isn't she rather shut away from the rest of the house?"

"It was her own wish. These rooms are quieter than any others. She is not troubled by either the noise or the smell of the kitchen here, and one has rather too much of both in the other part of the house. Then the sitting-room has a large balcony, with a veranda, where she can be carried when she is well enough—though it's a fortnight since she cared to be taken out, even there. And there is a little room opening out of the bedroom for her maid. She did sleep on a couch at the foot of the bed, but she snored so heavily as to disturb Adela, so she had her to sleep in the dressing-room."

"She should have some one with her who is a quiet sleeper. And a girl who snores loudly is likely to sleep heavily," said Tynsdell.

"Adela likes the girl, and won't part with her. And she has one good quality, that of being able to read aloud very well."

They were now at the door of Adela's apartment, and the handmaid in question opened it for them. She was a tall, stout girl, with rather a heavy-looking face, looking—as was indeed the case—an importation from the country. She appeared civil and good-tempered, and, even if she did snore at night, it was possible, Tynsdell thought, that Mrs. Horace Gordon might have a worse waiting-maid.

Adela was on a couch in her sitting-room. She was fearfully, terribly altered, since he had last seen her. She looked thin, exhausted, broken; but there was no fever, no cough. She ought not to be so ill. There seemed, as far as Tynsdell could judge, no real

disease to account for it; and yet he felt that she was dying. When they were alone, she told him as much.

"I don't think I shall live to see the autumn. I don't think I can. I get weaker and weaker every day."

He put various questions to her, and, at the conclusion, looked fairly puzzled.

"You *ought* to get better," he said, at last. "There is no earthly reason you should not—only——"

"Only that I have nothing to live for," she said, with a faint smile. "I suppose I am dying of what is called a broken heart. It will be a mercy when I am gone. Horace can start afresh in life then, and I—why the best, the only thing for me, is to die, and be forgotten. Life is one long pain. It isn't that I suffer bodily, but I *can't* forget. I don't wonder at women taking to drink—to brandy—laudanum—when they are in such a case as mine. Well, I haven't come to that, yet, and it is best to die before one does."

"I think I might do something for you——"

"Why should you try? I am slipping out of the world quietly. It is best that I should go. Horace wanted you to come, and I am always glad to see you; but you can do me no good. When I am gone, he will have his mother, and—and—Millicent Pembury. She is a good, innocent girl, I believe; but if she is such a girl as I was, as all the girls were I've ever known, she won't think herself too good for him then. A man is forgiven his sin almost before he repents it; but for me—why, if you were a woman instead of a man, you would tell me, that let me repent as I might, I could not be forgiven in this world, and hardly in the next."

Tynsdell sat with her a little longer, and then he went down, feeling it would not be very long before Horace was free, as she had said, to begin his life again.

When he was gone, Adela's maid helped her mistress into the bedroom, which opened out of the sitting-room, and then into her bed. Then she made up the fire, for the spring nights were chilly, and Adela very sensitive to cold. After that, she sat down to read her mistress to sleep, as it was her custom generally to do. The book was a novel. Adela seemed crowning the sins of her life by having novels read to her on her death-bed. But what else could she do? When the body is weakened, the mind is not very well able to undertake a course of serious reading, either scientific or otherwise; and as to "good" books, so called, they are generally the dullest and tamest of reading. Adela wanted—as do a great many other invalids, not half such sinners as was she, unhappy creature!—to be taken out of her own wretched self for a time—to forget her own miseries and pains in the troubles and sorrows of others. Maria, her waiting-maid, was almost as much interested in the book as her mistress. It was slightly sensational, and they were in the third volume. She read on and on for above an hour, and would have gone on for another, if Adela had not said, drowsily,—

"That will do now. Put out the lights, and go to bed."

Maria put out one candle, and took the other into her own little room, having first lit the night-light in her mistress's apartment. She took the third volume with her. Why couldn't Mrs. Gor-

don have kept awake till she had finished it? To fall asleep like that, when it was impossible to tell whether the story would end happily or otherwise! Maria was terribly vexed, and then she thought she would sit up in her own little slip of a room and finish the book. But her mistress might wake and want her before she had done, and then she would be angry with her for not having undressed and gone to bed, as she had told her. Why not read it in bed? If she nearly closed the door, her mistress, having the night-light burning in her own room, would not see that the candle was still lit in hers, and she could complete the story. Maria loved novels dearly. They were to her what drink was to the cook, who spent three-fourths of her wages in gin,—what lovers and flirting were to the housemaid, who had never less than three followers at a time. It was the only mode of excitement her otherwise dull phlegmatic nature cared for; and there are, perhaps, worse modes of excitement than a novel, especially if it be a fairly good one. Only, the best time to read it is hardly when in bed, especially if the reader is naturally of a drowsy nature, and inclined to sleep heavily.

CHAPTER XLII.

AN AWFUL WAKING.

TYNSDELL found his brother sitting, with his cigar for company, in the dining-room when he entered it. He looked up.

"Well, what do you think of her?"

"Dying."

"*Dying!* and it's only three years since I first saw her, and she was then as bright, and happy, and handsome a girl as any in the kingdom. Dying! well, she and I have paid for our folly. My life is a wreck and ruin, and hers—"

"Is nearly over."

"Poor thing—poor thing!" he said again, and then seemed busy in breaking the ashes from his cigar. He was sorry for Adela, but his brother could see that this news had its compensation. He had done what he could for her as far as material comforts went, and he had made her the one reparation in his power; but his life had been very wearisome to him, and the wages of his sin very bitter. If the partner of his sin were dead, the sin would be a dead thing too. He was kind-hearted, and he had liked Adela very much at one time, and he was sorry for her now; but still he could not help feeling, though he would not own it to himself, that her death would be the best thing possible for him.

The two sat and smoked, and talked at intervals, and another hour wore on, and then Tynsdell rose.

"I must be off early in the morning. I have promised Adela to see her, if she is awake; but if I were to stay here a month I could do her no good."

Horace went with him to his room.

"This is but a small house to have two separate staircases," said Tynsdell. "However, Adela is quiet enough in her part of the house."

"It is an addition made to the main building some years after that was erected, and it was easier to make another staircase than to open a communication with this," said Horace.

"Well, they seem comfortable quarters for an invalid, and the girl she has with her appears kind and attentive; but she is young, and it is hardly right for those two to be so shut away from the rest of the house as they are."

"Adela's bell can be heard in the kitchen, and, indeed, all over the house," said Horace.

"But in the night, when the servants are not in the kitchen, but shut up in their own bedrooms, and snoring, perhaps, as heavily as the one she has with her, it is not well that she should be left with only that one. And it is just in the night that anything might happen—very suddenly," he added, with a slowness that gave full meaning to his words. "I suppose," he added, after a pause, "; there is no way of getting to her rooms but down the staircase by which we have just come, and up the other? They are quite isolated?"

"Quite so. To tell you the truth, I never gave that a thought. Adela slept in the next room to this which I now occupy, alone, till the last six weeks. Then she took a fancy to those rooms, on account of their quietness. She thought, too, it would be better for her to be able to leave her bedroom for a sitting-room without being obliged to go downstairs to it. And she was not nearly so bad as she is now when she went there: so that the situation of the rooms never struck me in the light that it did you, at once."

"Let her stay in the rooms, by all means, if she likes them; but it is not right that she should have no other help than that girl's at hand in case of a sudden change. You had better have a professional nurse in—a good one if possible; they are to be met with, if you take a little pains; but, by all means let her have the girl near her still, as she likes and is accustomed to her."

When, at last, Gordon Tynsdell did get to his bed, he slept heavily enough. He was tired with his morning's work, and the railway journey that had followed it; and not all his pity for the miserable household into which he had been called could deaden the pleasant consciousness that there was no night-bell here to rouse him from his slumbers at their soundest. Poor Adela would not be likely to trouble him. There was no immediate danger in her case.

"She may linger, flickering weakly on, till the winter comes," was his thought; "then a little cold and a cough, and puff! the poor thing will be gone. But, at any rate, she ought not to be shut away from the rest of the house, and only that girl with her."

How long he slept, he never knew; but he was roused out of his sleep by a sharper summons than the most imperative pull at his night-bell that had ever yet been given by anxious husband or parent. It was a woman's shriek—loud, shrill, piercing. He sat up in his bed—it was the habit of his life—for his senses to come to his call the moment he awoke from slumber, and they did not desert him now. The house is on fire, and those two women, in the wing by themselves, are shut out from help, and it is there the fire is fiercest.

That was his intuitive conviction, and he sprang up prepared to

act upon it. He was dressed, as far as dress was needful under such circumstances, in a second; and then he opened his door. He found the servants huddling together on the stairs, a blanket round the cook, who having an idea that, in case of fire, it is best to make what salvage one can out of the wreck, had seized a bonnet-box which held a few clean caps and aprons, and was clutching them convulsively, staring round with half-open eyes, as if she had not yet slept off the effects of her nightly dose of gin. The housemaid was by her side, with a patchwork quilt around her, which, even in her fright, the girl had pulled coquettishly over her head. The man-servant, roused by the shrieks, stood half-dressed, with a jug of water in one hand, the tongs in the other, uncertain whether it was fire or thieves that he was called on to face, but ready to do his duty in either case, if only his fright and bewilderment would let him. And a horrible fitful light fell on this group, as every now and then forked tongues of flame shot from the other end of the building, and on Horace, as he came out of his room.

"Save yourselves!" cried Tynsdell to the servants; "and get out of the house as fast as you can!" He turned to his brother. "Adela!"

Yes, Adela! The two rushed headlong down the stairs, and up the flight that led to the rooms where the two women, mistress and maid, were in such peril. What did it matter to Horace that one of those women had been the ruin of his life?—that her death would be his social salvation? If she had been the dearest thing the world could hold, if her death would make the whole world henceforth a blank, he could not have rushed more eagerly to rescue her from the horrible fate that seemed impending.

She had fainted in the presence of her danger; but the girl by her bedside was rushing to and fro, blinded by smoke and vapor, and too terrified to know how to seek her escape. She had woke out of her sleep, into which she had fallen while reading her book, and found her bed-curtains in flames. It was her shrieks that had roused the house, and, like a maddened thing, she was now trying to escape from the fire that seemed everywhere around her, and had caught hold of the light garment she wore.

Adela Gordon had swooned with fright, and now lay in her bed, motionless and unconscious. Her husband raised her in his arms, and, as he did so, Gordon Tynsdell, telling him to put a blanket round her, seized another, and wrapped it tightly around the shrieking girl. There was not a second to be lost—the fire had seized the very flooring. The panels of the room were of wood, and they were crackling and falling in. Smoke and flame seemed to bar their way out at the door. "There is nothing for it but the way we came," cried Tynsdell, giving one look at the window. Both the women they had come to save were so utterly helpless, the one maddened, the other as if dead with fright, that there was no possibility of escape by the window, which would else have been the safer way. Only the staircase, on which every instant the flames were gaining. Tynsdell was the nearer to the door, and he half-tore, half-dragged his burden there. In another second—how he had done it he could not tell—but with singed hair, with scorched skin, he and she stood in safety below; and, as he turned to look

for his brother, there was a crash, a sound as of falling timber, and then, with a dull, heavy thud, Horace and the helpless woman he was bearing were hurled to the earth, with a mass of woodwork, and rafters, and *débris* falling on them.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE TELEGRAM.

POLLY and Millicent were at work together that afternoon in the room which was especially set apart for their multifarious occupations. The warm spring sunshine lit up the garden, which was blooming with early flowers; through the open window the smell of the lilacs came in, mingling with the song of the birds; and Polly herself, in her bright, pretty dress, was chattering almost as fast as they chirruped.

For let it not be for a moment imagined that Polly was, in the proper and sentimental sense of the word, at all heart-broken because of that foolish love-fit of hers. She had had a great trouble to bear, and she had to bear it still; but then she *did* bear it, bravely, womanfully, just as a girl should do who knows that love, in the ordinary sense of the term, is not the be-all and end-all of the existence of either man or woman. "Men have long ago settled that love is not all they have to live for," Polly said to herself, "and it is quite time that women were of the same opinion." Polly, at any rate, was of that opinion, and acted upon it. And yet her love for Gordon Tynsdell was worth a hundred of the inane mockeries of passion and affection which young ladies are apt to dignify by that name.

Millicent had been ready to die for love, just because, at that precise time, she hardly knew what else to do with herself; and to die when your life seems thrown on your hands, and you are quite at a loss what to do with it, is about all that it occurs to people of weak mental and physical stamina to do. But she could never have lived for her love as Polly would have done for hers. She would have made sacrifices, if there had been need of such; but she could not, like her friend, have made them so that they should seem no sacrifices at all. Polly would have gone to the wilds of Canada, or shared a garret in the poorest London street, with Gordon Tynsdell; but she was not going to spoil her life because it was not to be spent with him.

They were talking over their last undertaking, the so-called "Reformatory," into which they had received Miss Bligh's waifs. She had just sent them down one more—a little nameless, parentless creature, of five years old, whom Polly had now installed as pet and plaything to the elder girls.

"She will do them a great deal of good. She will help us in converting them to the belief that they are human beings. We'll try and make Christians of them afterward. But I think the one conversion must precede the other."

She was cutting out print dresses as she spoke. "Pink for Susan, the girl longed for it; and as it was to be her Sunday frock, it did seem a pity not to let her have it; besides, I *do* like to see them

hankering after a little finery. It's a step in the right direction. It isn't natural for anything feminine not to care for her looks."

"The steps are very slow that they *do* take in the right direction," said Millicent; "and if Mrs. Clare's health were to fail, where should we be?"

"We must look out for somebody in Mrs. Clare's place," said Polly, cheerfully. "But I wish she had some help. If we could get some one younger and stronger, who might act under her. But I shouldn't like to ask a girl in the village: they shrink from these poor creatures. If we had such a one as Madge."

"Madge?"

"Madge would be the right girl in the right place, as far as these poor lost ones are concerned. They couldn't despise her; and there was a wonderful amount of work in Madge, and of kindness, too, if one could only find the way to it. But I've written, and I've written, and Madge never answers; so I suppose she has drifted away—God knows where."

And over Polly's bright face there came a cloud, and the tears were in her eyes, but she went on with her work.

"I never could have undertaken these girls if it had not been for you," said Millicent. "But, then, what should I have undertaken if you had not prompted me? I seem always saying that. But this has been the hardest task of all."

"Mrs. Gordon has been a tower of strength, however," said Polly. "Oh! these good Hertfordshire folks would have had ten times as much to say of the audacity, the effrontery, the impropriety of your doings, and especially of this last one, if it had not been for her."

"A tower of strength; yes, she always seems that," said Millicent. "And yet what she has had to bear!" she added, thoughtfully.

"She is like you, Millicent. She has saved and blessed her own life in saving and blessing others," said Polly softly.

And, even as she spoke, the footman opened the door, and announced Mrs. Gordon.

She did not look much like a tower of strength now. She was generally pale, but her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes full of tears. She took Millicent's hand in both of hers, and Millicent felt that she was trembling as she held them. "What is it? What is it?" she said, as she bent over her and drew her to a seat.

"This—this;" and Mrs. Gordon produced one of those long yellow envelopes, which few women even yet can see with unmoved nerves.

Millicent read,—

"There was a fire at your son's house last night. He was much injured in rescuing his wife. Both are still living.

"GORDON TYNSDELL.

"13 Montpelier Terrace, Fulham."

And Mrs. Gordon looked at her with a face that was trembling and quivering. "He does not ask me to go to my son, my son who is dying! Oh, Millicent! have I been too hard, too stern in my condemnation of his sin, that they think I will not go to him now?"

"You will go, dearest Mrs. Gordon, you will go all the same?" asked Millicent, with tearful eyes. She was shocked, she was grieved inexpressibly at Horace Gordon's misfortune, but she felt more for his mother than she did for him. There were times when it seemed as if he never could have been her lover,—when she seemed almost to forget that he had ever been anything but her early playfellow and friend. So many other interests had crowded out this love. And then, too, love is to some women as religion is to many men, an easier thing to die than to live for.

"Yes, I must go, I must go. Of course I must go," she said, looking round with a terrified gaze. "Only how shall I bear the journey? Oh! to go on, and on, and on, and not know what may await me at the end!"

The two girls interchanged looks, and then Millicent said,—

"You are not fit to travel alone, dear Mrs. Gordon; Polly will go with you. Shall I ring and order the carriage at once to take you to the station?"

"Oh, if she would!" cried the poor mother gratefully. "But don't trouble about the carriage, my own's coming, with the few things in it I may want. Of course, I felt that I must go, and—and stay with him as long as I was wanted. Oh, Millicent! how long may that be?"

Polly had left the room to make her own preparations, and Mrs. Gordon paced restlessly up and down. "I couldn't wait at home alone,—I felt that I must come to you," she said, ever and again. "Oh, Millicent! have I been too unforgiving, and my son is dying now?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

POLLY'S CONQUEROR.

Mrs. Gordon had recovered her outward composure by the time Polly and she arrived in London. To all appearance, she was her usual, sensible, self-possessed self when she got out of the cab at the door of 13 Montpelier Terrace. It was a lodging-house of a superior description, and its mistress had been very ready to offer the shelter of her roof to Mr. Horace Gordon and his wife; and being only a few yards from their own dismantled residence, they were easily conveyed to it.

"I am Mr. Gordon's mother," said Mrs. Gordon, as the servant opened the door. And then she was afraid to put the question that was on her lips.

"I think he is going on pretty well, ma'am," said the girl. "Shall I call missis?"

"I would rather see Mr. Tynsdell, if he is here. Please show me into some room where I can do so."

"Mr. Tynsdell is with him, ma'am. He's always with him or the poor lady. And they've had two other doctors; and if you'll step in here I'll tell him."

"I thought you would come," Gordon Tynsdell said, as he took both her hands in his. "I thought it was needless of me to tell you that. There is no immediate danger; with God's blessing, we may yet pull him through."

And, that night, Mrs. Gordon took her place by her son's bedside —took it as a matter of course. There was no question of forgiveness. He was her son, and he needed her. Equally as a matter of course, Polly installed herself by the bedside of the other patient, of whose very existence Mrs. Gordon, in her intense anxiety respecting her son, had seemed unconscious. And there were very many days and nights of watching for both, for it seemed, at first, as if Tynsdell had been a little too hopeful of his brother's recovery. There was a time when he hung between life and death, or rather, death seemed the nearer of the two; but at last hope changed to certainty, and, one day, Tynsdell came out of the sick-room, with a brighter face than he had worn for weeks.

He went down-stairs for a little rest and quiet. But he wanted first to write to the medical friend who was taking charge of his patients for him down in Hertfordshire. The room he was in was the one in which Mrs. Gordon and Polly took their meals, and some few of Polly's possessions were scattered about. He had hardly seated himself, when she came in for a book that she had been reading.

"The nurse is going to lie down," she said, in the simple, matter-of-fact tone in which she always addressed him now—a tone that acted on him as a perpetual irritant, reminding him that she and he had nothing in common but their interest in the sufferers they were jointly attending. "I am going to take her place; and as Mr. Gordon is asleep, and likely to sleep for hours, I thought I should like to read."

"I have good news for you," he said. "Dr. Bayle agrees now in the hopeful view I have all along taken of Horace. There is no doubt in his mind now, as there never has been in mine, that he will pull through, after all, and be as strong a man as ever."

"Thank God!" she said, devoutly. "After all that we feared, it is as if he was given back to us from the dead."

"Something very like it. Yes, he has his life before him to begin afresh, and make what he can of it."

"I do hope he will make something of it now, for his mother's sake."

"I hope so, too. One mistake, one error—one crime, even—should not spoil a man's whole existence, should it, Miss Brooke? Is a man's whole life to be set wrong because of a blunder?"

"In his case there seems to me to have been something more than a blunder," she said, with heightened color.

"I was not thinking of Horace just then, I was thinking of myself. Miss Brooke, give me five minutes. The nurse can wait a little longer, and your patient doesn't need you yet. It is my own blunder, my own folly, for which I ask your pardon."

"I don't exactly understand you, Mr. Tynsdell, and I should prefer going to my patient."

"Your patient can spare you very well for a few minutes. Miss Brooke, a little time back, I think, you must have seen that my manner to you was that of a man anxious to ingratiate himself; if I had asked you to become my wife, you would have had no reason for surprise—nay, it would have seemed the natural sequence of the attentions I was paying you. Then—then—there came a change. I

hope—I think that I was always courteous, at least, but I took some pains to be nothing more."

"You were always that, and I had no right to expect anything more at your hands, Mr. Tynsdell." And Polly's generally bright, clear voice seemed now to utter words, petrified into icicles.

"Yes, you had. When a man pays a woman such attentions as I did you; when he tells her, in everything but words, that he thinks of her, cares for her, loves her! the next thing she has a right to expect is that he should ask her to become his wife. Will you let me tell you why it was I stopped short of that point, and why I bore myself so differently to you?"

"I can tell you in a word, and that word is—Amanda."

"Will you forgive me the mistake, the delusion? I have felt since it was one. I ask for no explanation on your part—I don't deserve one. But will you let me give you mine?"

"There's no occasion;" and Polly drew herself to her full height, which was not very much, after all. "If you cared for Amanda, and have found that the caring for her was the delusion that you spoke of, there's an end. That you *could* have cared for her, is sufficient for me."

"Good Heavens! Miss Brooke——"

"You were engaged to her, sir, till Mr. Tomlyn came in the way—or, at least, you were anxious to be so."

"Did she tell you that? Then, Miss Brooke, let me tell you that I was as much engaged to Mrs. Brooke as you were to your cousin in India, with whom you corresponded."

"Poor dear Tom! Married nearly a twelvemonth! And you believed that I was engaged to him; while—while——" then Polly's pride gave way, or, rather, asserted itself in a passion of indignant tears. "That you *could* have thought it of me!" she said.

"And what did you think of me, Miss Brooke? That I was engaged to your step-mamma!"

"That's altogether different," said Polly, with feminine logic.

"I don't see it. Still, as you have made a mistake, can't you forgive my making one, and trust yourself to me, now?"

"I—I don't know. I could never be happy with you if you doubted me for a second."

"I haven't doubted you one-tenth part of the time that you have doubted me. I saw my blunder very soon after I had made it, and I made up my mind to believe in you, if there were a dozen cousins in India. But you gave me no chance of retrieving my mistake. You seemed still convinced that I was first the accepted and then the discarded lover of Mrs. Brooke; and I must say that little lady has a wonderfully inventive genius. Pauline—Polly—don't you think she has made us both wretched enough? At least she has me. A want a wife, a helpmate. A year ago I thought I might find one in you. Won't you let me think so now?"

And Polly had found her master—the man whom she could love and honor, and trust in with all her heart. And he—why, he had found his queen; for what need is there to say which shall govern or which obey, which is the stronger and the better of the two, in union so perfect and entire as was theirs?

For they were truly mated, husband and wife, joining hand in hand to go through life's pilgrimage together.

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW MADGE WAS WON AT LAST.

Out of the shadow of the grave, as it seemed, Horace Gordon came back to his own place and his own people. Why should he not? It was surely time that folly of his should be forgotten. Speaking of him, people only called it folly; and if some austere matrons shook their heads and looked grave when his name was mentioned, they were just as ready to receive him into their own houses, and to enter his, "for poor Mrs. Gordon's sake!" as if poor Adela had never existed at all.

But she was living yet. Horace had a wife still, though no child of hers would ever call him father. The shock that should have killed the feeble life that seemed flickering so faintly, had roused some mysterious, dormant vitality within her. She might live for years—outlive, it might be, her strong, vigorous husband, who seemed to have risen from his sick-bed only more hale and vigorous than ever. But she would never set her foot to the ground again. From her sofa to her bed, from her bed to her sofa, that was all the change that Adela Gordon would ever know. One room would be her prison and her world. And if that room was within the walls of the Holmes, what did that matter to those outside? They came and they went; they visited Mrs. Gordon just as if her son's wife was not dwelling beneath his roof; and Horace went amongst them, and took his place again, as if the sin of his youth had never been.

But he could never flee from it. As the living to the dead, so was he tied to this poor, maimed, crushed creature—this wife, who would die childless, and might yet outlive him. Did it not seem, that if he had been dastard enough, and vile enough, to let her perish in the flames, his cowardice would have had a happier fate than his bravery had won? Possibly, if to have lived so vilely would have been worth the living at all. But that sacrifice of his had borne its fruit. There had sprung up in his heart, not love or passion—how could that be for this poor wreck?—but an affection born of pity, tender and gentle, such as he had never felt for anything before. Once, he had thought of her coming death as a release to him, now he would have shuddered at the thought.

As to his mother, when her son was given back to her, she had leisure to think of his wife. Till then, she had left her in Polly's charge, now she volunteered to assist her in the task; for this poor creature, with her faded beauty and her broken frame, helpless as an infant, and with, it might be, years of suffering awaiting her, did not seem the bold, shameful thing who had lured her son to his ruin. All her evil seemed passed away—purged and atoned for. Who could think of it now, in the awful doom laid on her?

And in this doom, which cast its dreadful shadow on her son, Mrs. Gordon saw her own punishment meted out to her.

"I would have had him free from her," she said to Gordon Tynsdell, "to begin his life afresh; and he has to begin it, but

linked to her more firmly than ever. Like hers, in some sort, his sin is to bring its life-long punishment."

As to Millicent Pembury, she is still unmarried. Horace Gordon and she are good friends, but their love has long been a thing of the past. It may be that Millicent may marry yet, for she is still in her early womanhood, and her beauty is all the brighter and the fuller, because the moment you look upon it you see that it is the beauty of a woman who has an aim and an object in life. If Millicent ever marries, her children will surely have reason to rise up and call her blessed. But are there no children who do that now? If ever she is wife and mother, she will do her work nobly as such; but let us, who are wives and mothers, be thankful that there are such women as Millicent Pembury in the world, to do the tasks that are beyond us. But there is one thing certain, if Millicent does choose a husband, it will not be for the mere sake of having one, nor will she enter into marriage because she does not know what better to do with her life.

As to Polly—well, Polly is a model wife. Does she obey her husband? Well, she loves him. And love comprises truth, and loyalty, and honor, and homage, all freely, fully given; and these are surely a little better than the unreasoning obedience of a slave.

If Polly thinks—and, right or wrong, girls and women of Polly's stamp do think nowadays—that mothers should have some right to the children they have borne; that women should have something to do with the making of the laws that govern them; and, above all, that a woman has not done her very utmost as a wife when she has duly attended to the cooking of her husband's dinner and the mending of his linen; why, nevertheless, Mr. Gordon Tynsdell's dinner *is* well cooked, and no man living has his domestic comforts better cared for. And God has given Polly children, to be the crowning joy and sweetness of her life. And if all this wealth of happiness makes her more eager to care for the unhappy wives crushed, degraded, by the very hand that should protect them—the outcast, the suffering, the helpless,—more eager, with her stronger nature and her greater energy, to act still as the right hand and the help of Millicent Pembury,—is Polly altogether a much worse specimen of womanhood than that essence of feminine softness and sweetness—Amanda Tomlyn, late Mrs. Brooke?

Amanda dresses charmingly, and spends her husband's money lavishly. She has given him two children, and, like their mother, they are beautifully dressed, and very pretty, and it is to be hoped their nurses will do their duty by them, and the family doctor look well after their health, for their mamma troubles herself exceedingly little about them. As to her other children, they are sent to boarding-school, for Amanda's sisters having married, and having little ones of their own to look after, and her mother being too infirm for their charge, Amanda found herself obliged to resume it. Mr. Tomlyn never took very kindly to these children—to use his own words, he had not bargained for them; and, therefore, they go to school nine months of the year, and spend the other three with Polly. Amanda has a very good cook, who finds it worth while to keep her situation, as the butcher's bills are not closely looked into; and Mrs. Tomlyn dreads soiling her dresses by entering the kitchen;

and Mr. Tomlyn comes home from business, and, having eaten his dinner, goes to sleep on one side of the fire, and Amanda dozes gently on the other, unless they are either giving or receiving those formal entertainments which form Mr. Tomlyn's idea of "society." But they are well matched. Who could wish him a better wife, or her a worthier husband? Only it would be an awful outlook for our poor humanity if this were all that marriage could lead us to.

And for the baby with whom my story opened. It was to prove no child of illustrious fortunes, no mysterious foundling, whose parents would claim it some fine day, and shower rewards right and left upon all who had aided it. Born, most probably, some sinless child of sin, whose death would be more welcome than its life, no one ever came to dispute Millicent Pembury's claim to it. In a little time it was the pet and plaything of its new home—the comfort, as she phrased it, of its adopted mother's heart, coming, as it did, in the place of the little one she had lost. And then, oh! why is it that little graves are always making, and little blossoms swept away before they ripen into fruit? Millicent's charge was taken from the simple folks who had grown to love it, from the children to whom it had come as a new sister, and it sleeps in the village churchyard —surely, not having lived its little life in vain.

"It was through the baby I first knew you, Polly," said Millicent; "and *but* for you, what would my life have been?"

"And it was through the baby that poor Madge first showed us she was a human creature, after all. Oh, if we could only reach Madge now? Oh, Millicent, the little one is better dead than to be like her."

Baby had been buried a month. It was a soft, mild day in the early spring. Daylight was fading, and Polly, who had been planting violets and primroses in a little grave in the quiet cemetery, rose from her task to go homeward. Two girls had been with her —two of those girls whose advent had been such a scandal in the village. The "baby" had been well known to them; for, as soon as it could toddle, it had been taken to the Lodge by Polly for them to play with. "The little creature will humanize and womanize them," she said to Millicent, "as nothing else will do." She took her own little one there now, but it did not quite fill Baby's vacant place. Some good folks wondered at that—that Mrs. Tynsdell should let her child be handled by these wretched children; just as they wondered that, in the quiet room where Adela Gordon lay, not living, but *enduring*, Millicent Pembury and she were the only visitors. It has been said, "To the pure all things are pure;" and it is the stainless and the sinless who, without smirch or soil, can come in contact with the lost.

Polly had stood by the little grave, telling these unhappy children, who had never known what childhood really is, of the little creature now gone to its Father. It had been as an angel on earth unto them. Polly had had a hard task with these girls, but Baby on earth had helped her greatly; would the "Baby" in Heaven do so still? It seemed so, for their tears were falling, and these two were not easily moved to tears. "Good-by, teacher," they said, softly, as they left her at the churchyard-gate, and walked homeward. Polly looked after them wistfully. "If I had only some

help with them! And Mrs. Clare is not so strong, and the task is almost beyond Millicent, and I cannot, *cannot* give them up."

The church was at the very end of the village, in a quiet little nook of greenness—an old church, with a large porch, beneath which many generations had exchanged greetings as they came out of the house of God. As Polly left the churchyard, she caught sight of a figure crouching in the porch—a woman, evidently, with garments worn to that nameless, colorless tint, that want seems to stamp upon its owner.

"Some tramp," thought Polly, "resting here." Then, presently, "I'll go and speak to her."

As she went, the woman never moved, but from under the shapeless bonnet, surmounted with what once had been some tawdry finery, she saw two fierce eyes gleaming. The face was pale,—she could see that, even in the gathering dusk,—but it seemed familiar, too. Was that bundle of rags—that poor, beaten-down, tired thing—Madge? Polly's heart leaped up within her. If Madge, in any strait, had sought her out, instead of claiming her dreary right of shelter in the workhouse, why there was hope for Madge, after all. She went up quickly to the wayfarer, and laid her hand on her shoulder. "Madge!"

"It's me, Miss Brooke," in the dull, weary voice of old.

"I'm not Miss Brooke, I have a home, and a husband, and a baby," said Polly, impulsive in her matronhood, as she had always been. "And, oh! Madge, do you know from where I come? The baby—our baby—your baby, that you saved and brought to life, is lying in the churchyard there."

"Best place for it," said Madge, in the same dull tone. "I was glad enough, I know, when my own little 'un went."

"Yours, Madge?"

"And I'd never a husband," she said, with a reckless, defiant laugh. "So take your hands off me, Miss Brooke. I'm not fit for ladies like you to touch, I know."

For all answer, Polly held her still the closer.

"Just tell me all about it, Madge. You've been in great trouble since I saw you. How did your baby die?"

"It was the damp and the cold that settled on its chest, and I'd no money to pay a doctor, and no warm house to keep it in, if I had. I stayed at that place at the lodging-house as long as I could hold out, but I broke down at last. The work was dreadful hard. Then I thought I'd go back to the Union—I'd a right to, you know; but I felt as though, if I once went back, I should never have the spirit to come out again; an' I'd seen nothin' yet; and somehow I did feel as if it were too soon to be shut out of the world altogether. So I shared a room with a friend out of place like myself, and went to the hospital, an' when I got better she persuaded me to go hopping; it would do my health good, she said, an' be a bit of a lark, like. So I went; an' then I fell in with—well, his name don't matter, an' may be this isn't fit for you to hear, but you've brought it on yourself. He seemed very fond of me. I do think he did care for me," said Madge, her voice softening into womanliness; "an' we took up together. He'd been a gentleman's servant, but he was out of place, an' so he'd gone hopping too. When we came back

to London, he got work at the stables now an' then, but he wasn't steady. He wasn't bad. He did beat me now an' then, an'—an' when my baby was comin' I asked him to marry me. I didn't mind for myself, but I thought I shouldn't like the little thing, if it lived, to be ashamed of its mother. An' he wouldn't. He said he come of decent farmin' folks, an' 'twas his own fault if he'd got down in the world, an' he didn't mean to stop down always; an' when he did get a bit up the tree, what would be said to him if he'd married a girl from the workhus? Well, my baby was born, an' then he 'listed; an' a week after he'd gone the little 'un died, an' I was real glad. What do the likes of I want with children? An' at any rate that won't never live to jeer me with where I cum from. Then I heard his regiment was staying at Ilchester, an' was going off soon to India. And he wrote to me, sendin' me a bit of money, an' sayin' he should like to see me afore he went. And I walked down to Ilchester—the money wouldn't hold out for ridin'—an' there I saw him, an' we'll never see each other again. He spoke kind, though, at partin', but he won't think much of me where he's gone. Then I thought I'd like to come an' see you; but when I got near the big house, the sight of it nearly scared me. I thought there'd be lots of servants, and they'd only jeer at me. I suppose, though, if you're married, you're not living there now?"

"If I had been, the servants wouldn't have kept you from me."

"Well, I have seen you now; an' I'm not sorry. I just crept here, being a quiet place, to rest a bit, and think of what I'd better do, an' it's odd you come upon me like this. I don't feel so tired now, an' I'll be gettin' back toward home."

"Home?" said Polly.

"Well, the Union! That's the on'y home I know of. Susan Smith—she's married now, her husband's in the Perlice, an' they're very comfortable together—tried hard to persuade me out of it. She was rare and angry with me at first when I took up with *him*, but she was kind, too, when the baby came, an' when it died she wanted me to go out to service again. But what was the good? I'd got no character an' no clothes, an' the Union's bound to take me in when they find I can't keep myself."

"But you won't go back to the Union now, Madge?" said Polly, firmly.

"There's nothing else for me to do. If I go out to service again, I shall either be drove to death with work, in a hard place like the last, or else looked down on, if I get into a better. I never minded the work, as long as my strength would only let me do it; but I can't stand the other."

"I can tell you of a place, Madge—a place where there will be no looking down,—where I have wanted you again and again,—where you might help us, Madge, better than any one I have ever known. Miss Pembury, who is as one of God's angels, has made a little home for some poor children—girls, Madge, who have never known a home—who have run wild in the streets and the gutters almost as soon as they could run at all. We want some help with them, Madge—we want some one who can work, and who will teach them to work; some one who will not be shocked if these girls are coarse, and rough, and worse, till we have

had time to teach them better things. Oh! Madge, you have known what it is to be a girl yourself, unloved and uncared for. Won't you help us with these? Girls who have had homes, and fathers and mothers, won't feel for them—won't care for them—would have no patience with their ways. But you would have patience, Madge—you would help us with them?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I feel so bad myself."

"You would feel better if you helped them. In helping Miss Pembury and me to make them good and happy, in helping Mrs. Clare, the mistress of their home, to show them how good and useful work should be done, you would learn that you—even you, Madge, might be of use in this world. And you would grow better and happier yourself. Oh! if you once knew the happiness of helping others, Madge! And how you *could* help us!"

"It's a queer notion, me helping two ladies like Miss Pembury and you."

"Oh, how you *could* help us!"

"I've been real bad," said Madge, doubtfully. "How would it be if they knew that?"

"They never will know it—you'll live it down. You'll be a good woman yet, Madge. If you have sinned against God and against yourself, live down the sin! There are years and years before you of good, useful work. Don't go back to the workhouse, and live a life that is worse than death. Stay with us, and some day your baby shall be your own again; and the little one you saved for a while, and that made Millicent Pembury and me feel as if we were sisters, shall come with it, to welcome you to the land where rich and poor are all alike. Stay with us, and help us, and save yourself while you are helping us to save these outcast girls!"

Polly heard Madge sobbing, and knew her victory was won. She had struck through the rock to the living spring at last.

And Madge, like Millicent Pembury and Pauline Tynsdell, has found her work at last, and does it.

THE END.

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